















*In Quest of*  
FOSTER PARENTS



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A POINT OF VIEW ON HOMEFINDING

*By Dorothy Hutchinson*



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## *Introduction*

*THIS BOOK* is written for the homefinder and for any social worker interested in the process by which foster parents are selected. My purpose is to discuss the psychology of homefinding as it may affect both the worker and the foster parents. Much has already been written about physical and cultural standards of foster homes. Less has been expressed concerning the inner significances which make up the character and spirit of homefinding. A second purpose is to give greater recognition to an area of case work that has so frequently held a minor place. Now that the war has brought in its train uprooted children and the consequent need for more foster-care services, there is a special importance to the subject. However, because the major part of this book was written before the advent of the present War, the accent in the main is on home finding as practiced in a country at peace and over a period of years when there was a notable expansion of social services. It is not the principles of homefinding which are changed by war but the conditions and circumstances under which these principles operate.

It is of course to be understood that homefinding is only one part of child placement and that in a sense it is misleading and superficial to separate it from the total setting to which it belongs. Nevertheless, considering the vital part that homefinding plays in child place-

ment, it seems important to bring to the front at this time a subject that deserves greater attention and more general recognition. It is assumed that those familiar with the general aspect of case work with children will fit the discussion of homefinding into the larger pattern of child placement.

The term "homefinding" here refers only to the selection and evaluation of the foster parents who apply to social agencies or to social workers for children. The term "foster parent" is used regardless of whether the child is placed in a boarding home, a free home, or an adoptive home. In referring to the foster parent as "she" in the text there is no intention of belittling the importance of the foster father. Rather, this merely follows accepted usage, which, because of the nature of the work, gives the foster mother the more prominent place. The titles "homefinder" and "case worker" are used interchangeably, and both, because of custom, are referred to as "she." Case material is used largely to illustrate theory. Because of the dearth of full recording in homefinding it has seemed feasible to select only parts of records or of interviews for this purpose. No attempt has been made to go into administrative problems of homefinding, but rather is the focus on the meaning of the experience itself.

A discussion of homefinding as it is experienced today needs to be seen against the background of earlier practice; nor can its development be separated from our own development as case workers, from our increasing knowledge of people, and from our convictions about the responsibility for using this knowledge. The term "homefinding" still has a rather rigid implication, despite various new approaches and philosophies de-

veloped from time to time about it. Whether it denoted a wholesale commercial enterprise to secure foster parents cheaply, whether it consisted largely of a real estate evaluation of foster homes, or whether it meant a dynamic study of people, the enterprise remained until recently remote from the rapidly unfolding influence of case-work doctrine. Heretofore, in the children's field, we were inclined to think of case work, on the one hand, and on the other, of its handmaiden homefinding. There were case workers in children's agencies and in addition "homefinders," usually a few hard-pressed workers who "turned out" foster homes in high-pressure fashion, trying to keep a balance between the appetite of the agency, the urgencies of would-be foster parents, and the child's inalienable right to an immediate situation in which he can grow.

Each stage of homefinding development has been the product of an earlier stage. Its growth has been spasmodic and irregular. Originally homefinding was dominated by a moralistic philosophy. The unspoken assumption was that foster homes were either good or bad and that the workers were responsible for measuring goodness and badness. These were the days when one descended unannounced, catching prospective foster parents off their guard, and measured goodness by respectability, morality, and cleanliness. Because the worker did not know what to look for, she weighed benevolence by superficial signs. She became adept in skipping the vulnerable spots in favor of the obvious external evidences of honor. This early era of homefinding coincided with the popular belief that children could be redeemed by an environment unblemished by dirt and distinguished by correct deportment. The

foster home was considered the vehicle of respectable opportunity by which the poor boy "made good." The selected home was always right, and the child won or lost it according to his ability to throw off old habits and take on the new ones of the foster parents. Thus, at the beginning of this century, homefinders sought largely for evidences of accepted decorum in foster parents, and in so doing they reflected the general mores of the times.

Long before workers discovered the boarding home there were only free homes, and these were used by workers in what might be called a humble and self-deprecating manner. Workers were then less helpful to foster parents, because they felt under too-great obligation to them and weighed down by the need to be grateful. All case workers were more inhibited in those days, and the prevailing use of the free home did not deviate from the "lady-bountiful" psychology prevalent in various case-work settings. The free home was looked upon as the all-giving charitable instrument; the agency itself as obligated to it. Furthermore, workers of this period brought to their jobs a set of cultural and moral standards and a degree of enlightenment insufficient for an understanding of foster parents as people.

Later, case workers became more closely identified with the foster child. They grew correspondingly more aware of their responsibility to him and as a result more particular about foster homes, even to the point of demanding of them an unreal and conventional perfection. The evidences of imperfection, if not too gross, were rationalized away and, in a sense, sacrificed to the need for homes and to the fear of responsibility for placement. Out of this situation there developed a period when outlines were used for foster-home inves-

tigations—detailed and topical forms covering the various general areas of the foster parent's life, such as education, religion, finances, history, personality, and so forth. This outline gave a descriptive and static picture of a family—not flesh-and-blood people, but people on paper. Furthermore, the worker took refuge in the outline. It was a convenient vehicle for simplifying what was really too complicated for her. She therefore developed “outline” behavior with foster parents, skipping from one topic to another and mentally filing away information on one subject before tackling another. This was an emotionally depleting discipline for the worker and an artificial experience for the foster parents. All homefinding records of this early era sound alike. They represent a regimentation and a response to the insecurities of hard-pressed workers. It is true that these foster-home studies were more complete than earlier ones, that the workers modestly took attitudes and behavior into account, but for some time these studies remained crystallized, dissociated, and unmoving portraits of people.

As case workers have become more sure of themselves, homefinding has profited accordingly, although it has been slow to scrutinize its function, its methods, and its goals. There are real reasons for this. It is no accident that homefinders are themselves hard to find and, once found, hard to keep. In many departmentalized agencies the homefinder's job came to be without honor, because expectations of the staff regarding the homefinder's output were too great and too unreal. In addition, the homefinder, because of the short-time nature of her contacts with foster parents, did not have the psychological satisfaction accruing from treatment. Furthermore, her situation was one of producing foster homes which fre-

quently proved fallible after placement. This often drew spoken or unspoken censure from workers in supervision who found the homefinder a convenient scapegoat on whom to place disappointment, frustration, and failure. Finally, the persistent necessity of passing judgment on would-be foster parents, which was frequently contrary to her case-work philosophy, brought a measure of emotional "wear and tear" that was unbearable.

Later, psychiatric understanding developed and gradually gave to the case worker in homefinding a growing responsibility not only for knowing foster parents but also using them with insight. Slowly case workers came to realize that foster parents are very human, that whether they develop or not, they do not fundamentally change; and that they are selected and used because of the normal gifts with which they are already endowed. Thus, it was discovered that the crux of homefinding lies in the selection of normally gratified people.

Case workers began to adopt a different way of using free homes and to use them less often when they discovered the greater flexibility of boarding homes and their willingness to accept all kinds of difficult children and parents who come to their front doors. Furthermore, the development of the boarding home coincided with the growing belief in the importance of the child's own parents to him and in the artificiality of separation and its subsequent trauma.

Modern practice in homefinding inherits all threads of past practice. The field is still temperamental in the sense that it is unevenly developed. It is forging ahead in some localities, while it remains rigid in others. In the broad field, however, it is taking on new dynamics. It is no longer generally subordinate to or isolated from the steady growth of case work, but is case work.



## *The Wish for Parenthood*

*THE* need to understand the incentive of prospective foster parents is of the greatest importance in home-finding, not so much because it is an end in itself, as that the incentive is a vital indication of what kind of people these are and what kind of foster parents they will become. We know people by what they want for themselves; by their various incentives, as well as by their present and past adjustment to life. In the case of foster parents the function of child placement is the instrument by which their wish for parenthood may be gratified partially, fully, or not at all. The necessity for understanding this request, its meaning and significance, lies in the fact that insight into their motivation may anticipate how foster children will be used and helps case workers to foresee what needs these children are supposed to fulfill for foster parents. That the incentive is often a conscious or unconscious request for love is not so important as the character of this love, its reasonableness and normality or its too unrelenting terms. If, therefore, case workers could really know why foster parents want a child, they would have the key to understanding them, a basis for selecting them, and later for working with them.

In the early part of this century all would-be foster parents were considered a priori benevolent. Only an unselfish person would have the urge to take in a home-

less child. Foster parents and foster children were associated in wholesale categories — the foster parents as charitable individuals, and the children as grateful recipients of their philanthropy. In recent years case work has liberated foster parents from this wholesale evaluation and has given them the dignity and sincerity of being real people. Case workers have discovered that they are human beings with their own individual desires, strivings, ambitions, gifts, needs, and fallibilities.

The would-be foster parent requesting a child to board or to adopt is almost always a woman. Whether the foster father is interested or not, the idea is proverbially born in the foster mother. She gives a variety of reasons for her application. She may be lonely; she may want a companion for her own child; she may have an idea that she will be doing good; she may have time on her hands; she may want to make some extra money, or she may feel that her life never will be complete without a baby. However expressed, her request always expects as an answer the securing of a child. Whatever her need, whether acknowledged or unacknowledged, there is one solution from her point of view—to receive a child.

The foster mother usually does not question her incentive, but rather takes it for granted. The case worker, on the other hand, needs to understand the meaning behind her incentive for the practical purpose of bringing about placements advantageous both for child and for foster parents. Foster parents are often not aware of the basic forces back of their request for a child and are frequently helped by the worker to see these to their own advantage. To what extent a case worker can determine the real meaning behind a request depends on her insight. In difficult or obscure situations, psychiatric

consultation is necessary. For the most part the worker is interested in what the request for a child signifies to the foster parent. What is it expected to accomplish? How does she wish to use a child? How incorporate him into her life? What need must he fulfill?

Understanding the incentive of foster parents implies an understanding of their behavior in particular and of human behavior in general.<sup>1</sup> Foster parents, like all human beings, are complex. We can not usually acquire an understanding of them and their behavior all at once, but rather after considerable time and thought.

There are many things one could say about prospective foster parents, but their wish for parenthood always revolves around the psychological question of "getting a baby" and is related to the biological urge—this, regardless of the age of the child asked for and whether or not the foster mother has children of her own. Experience has shown that her request is frequently characterized by excitement, urgency, and deep feeling. This to her is not an objective search, as for goods in a department store, but an experience of great personal significance, similar in importance to the intimate ones of birth, marriage, and death. The wish for a child so often reflects the desire to love or to be loved. Frequently children are to the foster parents the emblems of love. Especially is this true of little girls, and this is one explanation of the inordinate demand for them by adoptive parents. That foster parents are often searching for love or more love or a different kind of love is not dis-

<sup>1</sup> For those who are interested in understanding human behavior, especially as it relates to parenthood, the following books are recommended: Levy and Munroe, *The Happy Family*; C. Anderson Aldrich and Mary M. Aldrich, *Babies Are Human Beings*; Wolf, *The Parents' Manual*; Garrett, *Interviewing: Its Principles and Methods*.

qualifying, but it is a significant clue to a richer understanding of them. The crux of the matter lies in the degree of normality and reasonableness of their love-specifications. An adoptive mother may insist, in highly rigid and explicit terms, on the qualifications which she wants and must have in a baby. It must be a girl, of specified coloring, age, intelligence, parental status, nationality, and temperament. The striking factor is the tenacity with which she may cling to these specifications even after she learns that, practically speaking, her conditions are unreasonable and a hindrance. A prospective adoptive father may be unwilling to deviate from his determination to have a boy who at all costs will fulfill his own frustrated ambition. Such inflexible and narcissistic requests are in contrast to the requests of the foster parent who can easily consider a reasonable range of children and does not come with terms too preconceived or irrevocable. The former foster parent is unable to think realistically about the available children and instead clings only to unrealistic wishes. When too rigid demands are made by foster parents, it is questionable whether they really want a child.<sup>2</sup> Each request of foster parents therefore has its individual and distinguishing features, and the incentive behind the request always has its exclusive meaning.

The urge to secure a foster child can be wholesome or unwholesome. Some foster mothers wish to perpetuate normal, genuine satisfactions of motherhood which they experienced with their own children, now grown to independence. Some seek a mature fulfillment of parenthood, denied them for real physiological reasons. Others, on the other hand, may desire to perpetuate

<sup>2</sup> Knight, "Some Problems Involved in Selecting and Rearing Adopted Children," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, V (No. 3, May, 1941), 67.

early neurotic relationships in their own family or may see in the potential foster child an opportunity to realize their immoderate specifications for love. Adoptive applicants may wish a child in order to fulfill a love more satisfying than that which exists between husband and wife. In case work with unmarried mothers it has been demonstrated that the experience of conception is frequently not a truly mutual one in which both the man and the woman give credit and honor to the other, but instead is a one-sided affair.<sup>8</sup> The woman may want to feel that she has the child all by herself. The father is of little or no importance to her. The same general idea may be expressed in certain applications for foster children, when the agency, not the father, is the means by which the child is obtained. Surely the wish for a child is a healthy, normal, and universal desire of every woman, but the purpose for which the child is desired, the terms on which the request for him is made, and the subsequent use to which the child is put may be wholesome or unwholesome. Dr. Harry Levey says:

The neurotic is a person who, for the sake of his unreasonable safety needs, must surround with too many precautionary specifications the kind of love he requires; his specifications are frequently of such a quality or quantity of love that eventually it becomes difficult for friends and relatives to afford him the kind of relationship he unconsciously seeks and deems necessary because safe; when his needs for a special kind and quantity of love are frustrated, the hostility and sequel anxiety of the neurotic mount inordinately.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of this lies in the case worker's need to recognize when the request, on the one hand, is healthy and beneficent, and, on the other, when it is too neurotic

<sup>8</sup> Brenner, "Case Work Service with Unmarried Mothers," *The Family*, XXII (No. 8, December, 1941), 270.

<sup>4</sup> Levey, "Supervision of the Transference in Psychiatric Social Work," *Psychiatry*, III (No. 3, August, 1940), 422.

and destructive. Experience has led us to disqualify prospective foster parents whose own exaggerated needs would inhibit them from making a positive contribution to a child's development. To select sufficiently healthy foster parents is basic in child placement. Such parents are worth more than any sum can buy.

The wish to become a parent often has a direct connection with the foster mother's feeling about men and herself in relation to men. It is so usual as to be almost proverbial that foster fathers remain in the background during the application-process and when sought out by the case worker express their interest largely in formal terms of approval for their wife's plan. Frequently their interest is not vigorous, but often merely a passive acquiescence. Frequently the foster father will say, "It's up to her, it's her business" or "She's the one to decide because she'll have most of the work" or "It's O.K. with me if she wants to do it." In the majority of applications for boarding children foster mothers are described as the more dominant personality of the two, and foster fathers are frequently "quiet and retiring." It is traditional that foster families which wish to board children are typical of the matriarchal family group. The foster mother is the head, the organizer, the director, the mother, and now a small wage earner. This is not to imply that foster mothers with such capabilities cannot be feminine persons or that there are not many boarding homes where responsibility is not divided appropriately between the masculine and the feminine, or that such divided responsibility cannot be mutually satisfying. It does acknowledge that the foster mother's attitude toward men, whether disparaging or appreciative, is a potential clew to the meaning of her desire for a child.

The foster mother who is "down on men" has little respect for them and must be entirely self-sufficient reflects a degree of independence which is unfavorable from the stand-point of her relationship with her husband, the possible child to be placed, or the agency with which she is to work. To some foster fathers the initiative of the wife, her ability to augment, even modestly, the family income, and her addition of a "ready-made" child to the family personnel can be threatening to masculine self-esteem. In other cases this behavior on the wife's part is no reflection on them or on their own adequacy. To be able to take initiative is essential for all foster mothers, and child care is, after all, in the main a woman's job. Speculation about her incentive, as it may relate to her feeling concerning men, is not for the purpose of speculation per se, but for greater understanding and awareness in the selection and later possible use of the foster home.

The financial incentive of foster parents who wish to board children has been invested with strong feeling on the part of case workers and the lay community. Originally it was condemned by both. Anyone who took money for a child was commercializing motherhood. Case workers still feel that families on relief or a marginal income do not make relaxed foster parents and that the agency and the child cannot profit when a price is put on his head. There is no general answer for this situation. The financial factor in motivation, its extent, urgency, and significance has to be weighed and analyzed against all other factors. If case workers correctly rule out foster parents who must depend entirely on income derived from boarding children, they still are faced with that large group who want to make "a

little pin money." These foster mothers, in general, often want a child for some other reason also, but cannot afford to take him without financial help, at least enough to cover the additional expenses of his care. The significant fact is that they choose to add to their incomes by taking a child, for there are more profitable ways of doing this, and ways that do not involve the deeper levels of self. With them the financial motive is often a superficial one and many times a rationalization for something else. This is not to deny that foster parents frequently wish to earn money or that this desire disqualifies them any more than it does the worker who receives payment for her services. It is to say that the financial interest, whether keen or mild, is frequently only one interest interwoven with other interests of equal or even greater significance.

One of the reasons for taking a foster child commonly given by both boarding and adoptive parents is companionship for their own child. This reason is rarely what it seems, but like the money motive it often disguises a more urgent need. Experience shows that the foster child is usually expected to do something not only for their own child but for the foster parent as well. A foster mother may feel that she hasn't done well with her own child, and she may want another chance to prove that she can succeed with a foster child. She may be disappointed in her child and may seek another who will be more really satisfying, or, on the other hand, she may wish to spread the abundance of her mothering to an additional child. She may want a larger family than it is possible for her to have either for physiological or psychological reasons. She may be seeking for the assurance of a girl if her only child is a boy. Sometimes the



foster parent says she wishes a child as a companion for herself—but children are not essentially companions for adults. True, they bring satisfaction, but not in the sense of providing a leisure-time activity. Of a couple who applied for a child of five or six years of age to board as a “companion” for their own child, Tom, age three, the worker writes:

Mr. J. took the initiative in applying for a foster child. He evidently has considerable drive to achieve, has continued his education through college and partly through a law course by attending night school. His desire for a foster child is possibly motivated by his identification with Tommy and his need for him to achieve. He seems to think a foster child would help mold T. into the kind of child he thinks he should be in contrast to what he sees T. to be now—an only child “spoiled” by indulgent parents. Mr. J. also shows a need to be an adequate father. Actually he gives a lot of evidence of being very insecure and of lacking warmth for children and understanding of them. It is possible that he is resentful of T. because the latter's birth terminated his law studies, at least temporarily, due to a reduction in the family income when Mrs. J. had to stop work.

Mrs. J. appears to be a better integrated person than Mr. J., and has some positive qualifications in her relationship with children, but they seem insufficient to balance the negative as shown in her relationship with Tommy. She is over-protective of him, indicates a need to keep him a baby, and an inability to place any limitation on his behavior. She is inflexible in her requirements of the agency, and there is some evidence that basically she does not want a foster child but needs to have the application approved in order to maintain her status, particularly with Mr. J. She shows total inability to identify with a foster child. She is ambitious too, and there are indications she may be resentful of T. because his birth has delayed Mr. J.'s completion of law school and probably terminated permanently her plan of getting a college education herself after Mr. J. finishes.

The purpose of taking a foster child to be a companion to an own child can be a sound incentive when the foster parents are reasonably mature and satisfied

people. In the above illustration the incentive is to make up for deficiencies in the foster parents themselves, and it gives a vivid indication of the use to which a foster child might be put.

The adoptive applicant is not essentially different from the person who wishes to board a child, in fact the latter may have the same hope of permanency, but may seek through the boarding experience first to test out herself and the child. When this is the case, the boarding mother is seeking safety in an uncertain step. At the same time foster parents who wish to adopt, especially when they are unable to have children of their own, bring an enormous emotional investment to the experience—usually greater than that of the boarding applicant who already has children of her own. Not to be able to have a baby hits at a woman's most basic pride and a man's cherished self-esteem. There is competition in babies as in everything else, and not having them can be a threat to the only immortality we know. The adoptive applicant usually wants a child of his own, and, being denied this, he seeks the reflection of himself in the child to be obtained through the agency. Therefore his characteristic emphasis on physical factors, such as color of hair and eyes, nationality, and so forth. His primary wish is often for his own child, or, failing that, the assurance that his own more attractive features and qualities be perpetuated. The own parent hopes his fallibilities will not appear in his child. The adoptive parent naturally would prefer to see continued only his better qualities in the foster child.

The foster mother who wishes to adopt a baby is immediately exposed to the question of why she does not have one of her own. Her coming to the agency may be

the last step in a series of steps which have exhausted modern medical resources, with the answer still unknown. On the other hand, she may have a physical condition which, while not impairing her general health, makes it impossible or unwise for her to become pregnant. It is those childless couples where no physical difficulty seems to interfere with desired pregnancy that so often confound themselves and the worker—situations in which there is possibly a neurotic basis for childlessness. A woman may well be able to have children, but may unconsciously refuse to have them. She may unwittingly feel that she has no right to them or feel too guilty to allow herself this very common privilege. She may fear birth itself, or she may be unable to give honor to the husband. She may be a woman whose love needs and requirements were so deprived and thwarted in childhood that she must continue to be mothered herself rather than to give mothering to some one else.

It is not possible to separate arbitrarily, functional sterility from organic sterility; nor does finding some basis for organic sterility always rule out unconscious conflict as a contributing factor. The significant question lies in the relative proportion of organic sterility to functional sterility in any given situation. Dr. Robert P. Knight<sup>5</sup> states that the presence of "strong unconscious

<sup>5</sup> Knight, "Some Problems Involved in Selecting and Rearing Adopted Children," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic*, V (No. 3, May, 1941), 67.

"Practically speaking, a married couple does not consider adopting a child unless reasons exist which prevent them from having a child of their own. Sterility in one of them is perhaps the most common cause of childlessness. Aside from organic sterility produced by surgical removal of a generative organ, natural or artificial menopause through surgery, x-ray or disease and pathology of the generative apparatus due to maldevelopment or some disease process, there is a very important kind of sterility of a functional character. The generative organs seem to be normal but conception does not occur, even though no contraceptive measures are used. Since it not infrequently happens that a childless wife does become pregnant some time after

opposition in the woman to child-bearing can be contradictory to her consciously expressed wishes for a child."

Related to this is another aspect of adoption that is practically always evident at the point when foster parents are first shown the child that may become their own. The foster mother, especially, shows certain characteristic behavior at this time, perhaps excitement, anxiety, and indecision, that suggests she is actually experiencing psychological "labor pains." That this is true is not disqualifying, but it obviously introduces a situation which needs to be understood. In the following selected interviews the worker's awareness of the meaning of this experience to the foster parents is shown and also her responsibility for helping them with it.

Mr. and Mrs. R. are an attractive, happily married couple who are unable to have a baby of their own. They wish to adopt a baby less than a year old if possible, either a girl or a boy, and they plan to take a second child

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adopting a child . . . one is led to theorize that unconscious opposition to child-bearing might have been responsible for the functional sterility, and that this unconscious opposition was somehow overcome by the experience of adopting and taking care of a child. . . .

"Whatever the mechanism of unconscious avoidance of conception, the important factor . . . is the existence of a strong unconscious opposition in the woman to children and child-bearing which opposition is at variance with her consciously professed wishes to have a child. . . . It is also evident . . . that many couples do achieve conception or become the victims of an accidental un-wished for conception who have strong conscious or unconscious opposition to children and child-bearing and who, therefore, are not likely to make good parents. . . . Adoption agencies have control of the situation and can rule against parents in whom searching interviews reveal the presence of strong negative feelings regarding children. . . . The best foster ('adoptive') parents, other factors being equal, will come from those couples in whom the sterility is organic, especially if they desired, had and lost a child prior to the onset of the organic sterility, or those in whom the functional sterility exists in spite of sustained and consistent desire over a period of several years to have a child, provided the child is not desired merely to help preserve a shaky marriage."

later. At the time of the following account the home has been studied and approved, and Mr. and Mrs. R. are about to be shown a 6-month-old baby girl, Suzanne, who has been cared for since birth in a boarding home of the agency.

6-3 I met Mr. and Mrs. R. by appointment at the office. Mrs. R. was quite nervous, and I noticed her hands trembled. Mr. R. was a little bit more self-contained and poised. I told them the purpose of our interview today saying I wanted to tell them about little Suzanne Welch and if they were interested in seeing the child we could go directly to the boarding home in which she was. They raised very few questions as I talked about Suzanne, her background and her medical history. I felt at the time that they were really too excited to take in completely what it was that I was telling them; that they were ready only to see this child, not to hear about her, and I therefore terminated this interview after about 15 minutes.

With Suzanne, the R's were at first strained. I had told them in advance that Suzanne kept her mouth open most of the time and had indicated to them that our doctor's findings around this had been negative. However, Mrs. R. commented on Suzanne's open mouth in a questioning way.

The strain showed itself most clearly about half way through our half hour with Suzanne, when Mrs. R. said, "Her ears are not at all like ours."

I said, that Suzanne was after all not their child so that it was probable that her ears would not be like theirs.

Mr. R., apparently feeling his wife's anxiety, and liking Suzanne, as it was clear he did, would remark on how she laughed and pointed out to Mrs. R. certain little attractive mannerisms of the baby.

I told Mrs. R. that seeing a child the first time could be upsetting. She agreed that it was. I wondered whether she had any idea as to why she should feel so anxious. She said that she did not know really why she felt this way. With Suzanne, she felt strange. I had originally planned to talk more with the R's. about Suzanne, but because I felt that Mrs. R. needed some additional time to digest this experience, I agreed that we could postpone further discussion of the baby until our next meeting.

6-7 Mr. and Mrs. R. arrived quite early for their appoint-

ment. Together we went over to see Suzanne. Again I had the feeling that she was extremely excited.

When we reached the boarding home Mrs. R. said that she could scarcely wait to see the baby. She was smiling and I thought quite eager about seeing Suzanne again.

As Mrs. R. walked into the room in which Suzanne was lying in her crib she exclaimed, "Why, Ralph, she is simply beautiful." Mr. R., extremely pleased, said that he had been telling her that she was very beautiful. Mrs. R. was much more free than she had been the last time in her response to the baby. She immediately picked her up, fondled her, walked up and down across the room several times with the baby, talking to her very sweetly and affectionately. Suzanne is a baby who has not had too much of this kind of attention. At first, she seemed not to know what it was all about but quite soon she warmed up to Mrs. R. and was cooing and smiling.

I remarked that I thought the R's. must have been through a good deal since they had last seen the baby. Obviously relieved at this, Mr. R. burst out laughing and said that I would never believe what had gone on since last week. They had talked of nothing else but the baby. Mrs. R. had been dreaming consistently every night about her. I said that this was natural.

I wondered whether what she was really worried about was the question of Suzanne's mouth or her ears. With this, Mrs. R. reached out her hand to mine and clasped it very warmly.

She remarked that she would never be able to repay me for what it meant to have me talk to her in this way right now. She wanted to tell me what she had been through. She felt better already. I said that perhaps she had really come to realize what adopting a baby meant. She said that was exactly it. She would never have in a million years anticipated that she would react in this way. As she had told me last time, her ideas of seeing a baby for the first time would have all been in terms of making an immediate response to a child, fretting only in not being able to take the child home right away.

I said that instead of that, she had felt critical of the baby. Did she have any idea as to why this was? As if speaking out loud almost, Mrs. R. went on to say she is pretty sure it is because she never before actually realized that she was not going to be able to have her own child. At this point I reassured her. She said that, realizing that one cannot have one's own baby was something quite different from going through the experience of

having to see someone else's baby as her own. Somehow, today, walking in and seeing Suzanne again, she felt differently. I wondered why. Again speaking very thoughtfully, Mrs. R. said that perhaps this was so because in the past week she has lived through the experience, of knowing now that she cannot have her own child and the selecting of another baby as her own. I said that I knew she had been worried about herself and the baby and asked how she felt about Suzanne now. She said that now there is no question but that Suzanne is their baby. I must see now that after all it had nothing to do with Suzanne, it was something which had to do only with herself.

I asked her how Mr. R. felt about all this. Mr. R. said that he had known from the beginning that Suzanne was the baby for them. Mrs. R. said, looking lovingly at her husband, that that was another thing which had made her feel badly. She and Mr. R. always see eye to eye even on the most minor kind of details. That she should have felt differently about Suzanne bothered her. She said that, after all, it was not Mr. R's fault that they could not have a child of their own. She supposed that that was why she had felt so much more intensely about this whole experience.

Mrs. R. then turned back to Suzanne and began to play with her in a nice manner. I have seen babies who are more responsive than Suzanne, but Mrs. R. seemed to be completely oblivious to this. All she seemed to see now was that here was her baby. Immediately she began to raise questions about when it was she could take Suzanne home with her.

The R's were really exhilarated, very happy and giggling together. I thought they had an easy relationship together and now that they were able to express themselves I was impressed with them as good people for parents for our baby.

The R's, Dr. Abbott, the R's pediatrician and I met at Mrs. Smith's. Dr. Abbott admired Suzanne tremendously. He said that he thought she was an extremely good baby. He talked briefly with the R's about the question of Suzanne's open mouth and was quite casual in his attitude about these defects which he said were easily remediable. He left shortly after.

Mr. and Mrs. R. waltzed around the room in their excitement. Again today they brought more toys for Suzanne. Now they wanted to begin to talk immediately about when they could take her. Together we decided that Suzanne could go to them on 6-10.

I drove back with the R's and they stopped in the office briefly so that they could sign the agreement form. They were extremely relaxed and easy with me. They seemed to be feeling very close to each other. Mr. R. bought theatre tickets for an evening performance in order to celebrate with Mrs. R. They talked about what a big evening they were going to make of this and how important a step they really felt taking Suzanne was.

Mrs. R. is unable to see Suzanne in an appreciative light until she has really acknowledged that she cannot have her own baby, a fact basically threatening to her womanly pride. When this is admitted, she is free to look at the baby and to love her despite the baby's features which differ from her own (ears and the open mouth). Mrs. R.'s criticism of Suzanne is her last defense against her own inability to bear a child. In the excitement, the pain, and the struggle with herself lie the psychological components of giving birth. This situation is characteristic and inherent in what the experience means to Mrs. R. It is true that the behavior of women adopting children is not always as marked and graphic as this, but some such attitude is almost always apparent. The worker was able to help Mrs. R. because she was sensitive to what was happening and wished to be of assistance to her. She did not condemn her because of her conduct, nor did she feel that Mrs. R. must be a "nervous" woman and therefore of doubtful suitability for a foster parent. The case worker shows first that she knows her person (in this case Mrs. R.); secondly, she understands the significance of the episode; and, finally, by sympathetically drawing Mrs. R. out and reassuring her as to the naturalness of her behavior at this time she helps her to use the insight she has.

All pregnant women have complex and ambivalent feelings about their pregnancy and the child. This is



normal for them. Popular opinion has idealized motherhood and in so doing has denied to the pregnant woman the naturalness of both wanting and not wanting her child at the same time. The adoptive mother, likewise, will frequently (as did Mrs. R.) show uncertainty about the baby shown to her. This is to be expected and is a natural part of her psychology at this time.

The incentive to board or to adopt a child is not an isolated impulse separated from the rest of the foster parent's life. Before the incentive crystallized into action and brought her to the agency with a definite request for a child, it usually existed if no more than as a latent idea. Every prospective foster mother comes with some imaginary picture and notion as to what having a child to care for will be like and about herself in relation to the child. The adoptive parent more often than not dramatizes herself with a little baby, "the younger the better." One woman may fancifully picture herself with a charming blonde blue-eyed girl that she dresses up like a doll and displays proudly. Another, on the other hand, may give us a "candid camera snapshot" of herself with a more realistic child and herself in the midst of a busy, active and challenging existence. In other words, clues to incentives may appear from the imaginative pictures of children, and of themselves as parents drawn for us by foster parents. Such pictures can help the worker to anticipate some of the needs, hopes, and ideals that a child will live with. While a knowledge of incentives may foresee the kind of future the foster parent has in mind for herself and a child, it may, at the same time, continue the strivings and longings, the satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the past. A middle-aged happily married woman recently wished to take a child to board be-

cause her "old invalid father had died." She had gained a high degree of satisfaction in caring for him day by day, for he was like a child for her. She was lost now and had time on her hands. She wished to perpetuate the kind of satisfaction she had experienced in caring for her father. Both her love of her father and her feeling of responsibility for him had resulted in a commendable job. She now chose a real child on whom to lavish affection and care. Her two married sons had lives of their own. The choice of a little girl meant, for the foster mother, the fulfillment of a need of long standing, which had temporarily been satisfied by the care of her father. That the foster child in this situation was a substitute and a fulfillment of her love did not prevent the foster mother from doing an adequate job.

To understand in some measure the incentive and the need of the prospective foster parent is of extreme importance in homefinding. It is not merely an attempt to discover the gratified and the ungratified areas in the lives of foster parents, but is for the purpose of a better understanding of these people and therefore of use in the selection and placement of the child. The responsibility of the agency and that of the worker for comprehending motivation is clear, because the foster mother's request for a child is to gratify a need by means of this child for whom the agency has taken responsibility.

Clews to motivation come to light as we learn to understand the behavior and attitudes revealed in the total study of each foster parent. As in all areas of case work, they are more elusive when the worker's own need is involved. It may be either her professional need to supply a foster home for a child or her conscious or unconscious need to find a home for herself. She cannot gain

an understanding of incentives if she is afraid of foster parents, loves them too much, or has a guilty conscience about them. A knowledge of motivation does not come easily. It appears, eludes, reappears, retreats, and becomes manifest throughout the worker's total experience and efforts to know prospective foster parents. Its final clarification is an outgrowth of the worker's maturity, her capacity for insight, her ability to observe, and her skill in reading personality. In homefinding practice this subject has frequently remained concealed, and this largely because it is a considerable one and difficult. It is true that gaining insight into the wish for parenthood can be considered unprofitable if it means the approval of fewer homes. This fear would seem unwarranted and unreasonably pessimistic. Knowing something of the incentives of prospective foster parents will not disqualify more applicants, but will mean that we know better how to select and how to use those we do approve. Even allowing for mistakes, the great increase and sustained use of foster-care services throughout the past twenty years attests the large number of wholesome, kind-hearted, and well-adjusted foster parents able to share their lives and their gifts with foster children and social agencies.

## *Introduction to a Foster Mother*

*THE DEVELOPMENT* of homefinding has formalized the order of certain case-work steps—the office visit, the home visit, and references. Deviations in this order may occur as a result of individual factors, such as the location of the home or significant early findings. In a rural section, for example, a worker may find it impossible for a prospective foster mother to travel a great distance to make her application. A city worker may choose to see a doctor's reference before making a home visit if the wisdom of this is indicated and the foster parents' consent is assured. Despite variations, an initial office visit by the applicant has come to be common practice. The reasons for this are practical and at the same time implicit in case work. An office visit may be an economic measure if it eliminates at an early point an applicant who for obvious reasons cannot serve the agency and its work—for example, an aged woman of 70, a single man, or perhaps a woman who lives in too-crowded quarters. The office visit is timesaving, but as the beginning of a case-work process its value is of more critical importance.

The case worker whose first contact with a would-be foster parent takes place in the latter's home is often inwardly embarrassed. She may feel caught between her dislike of asking for something and the fear of being denied. She may feel thwarted because of her conscious

need to get information while at the same time she knows that this information may be disqualifying to the foster mother. Such dilemmas may trouble the worker wherever the contact takes place, but they are more likely to do so when she goes first to the foster mother's home and, in a psychological sense, feels that she "invades her citadel." Homefinding always means getting to know someone quickly. In addition, it means knowing a person who comes to the agency not so much because she wants help for herself as that the worker holds in her possession something she is looking for—a child. The foster mother does not want the agency or the worker, but accepts them as necessary tools, good or bad, in order to consummate her request for a child.

In this awkward situation the present requirement of the office interview as an initial case-work measure has helped to eliminate this dilemma. Here the worker is not seeking but rather being sought. The prospective foster mother herself initiates the contact, takes the responsibility for making her request, and decides whether she wishes to go further with her application. This often has greater meaning and carries more conviction as to her interest and purpose than if she expressed her desire for a child only by letter. That she is willing to take the first step and to seek out the agency is proof of this interest, to herself and to the worker.

The use of the first office interview is varied and falls into no one clear design. It has suffered from being formalized to the extent of asking mechanical questions, such as occur in the agency's application blank. Frequently these are focused on practical identifying details (name, address, finances, number of rooms, references, and so forth), the discussion of which serves as a means

by which the worker receives a beginning impression of the applicant. Traditionally the climax of the interview was reached when the worker gave or withheld an application blank, depending upon her feeling that this person was or was not a favorable candidate. Such situations were not always forthright. Sometimes application blanks were given as rewards, not so much because the worker thought the applicant was promising, but more as a "smoke screen" for the worker herself, who might not wish to disappoint or to hurt the applicant. It was easier for her not to withhold the application blank, despite her knowledge that giving it to the foster mother is always taken as a sign of the worker's initial approval.

The early traditional routine of the first office interview has been supplemented by a more flexible use of this interview and is now colored by our knowledge that the foster mother asks for a child, and gets an agency too. In boarding situations she frequently acquires the child's own parents in addition. At first the realities of taking a child, are for her, usually unknown, vague, or fanciful. We know a prospective foster parent cannot hope to make a real decision as to her willingness to embark on such an enterprise unless she has at least a perception of what the job is really like, what it may "take," its difficulties as well as its satisfactions. Many office interviews with prospective foster parents, as well as visits to the home, are now distinguished for their interpretation of these realities.

The objective of the first interview is for the worker and the applicant together to decide whether they wish to proceed with the application. The mutualness of this decision does not preclude the fact that individual decisions are being made at the same time—the foster

mother as to her interest and determination in continuing her application; the worker as to a tentative idea of the former's capacity for the job. Throughout the whole range of the homefinding process the function of evaluation runs threadwise. It is a critical and delicate one for both worker and applicant. Every would-be foster parent knows she will or will not be given a child; that her request is acceptable or unacceptable; that there are terms, qualifications, and conditions to be met. Every worker knows that over and beyond her acceptance of the applicant as a person lies the necessity of deciding some time whether she is or is not acceptable as a foster mother. This "sizing of each other up," a kind of back-and-forth testing out, is inherent in the situation and needs to be eased by the worker's awareness of what is going on and her own feeling of being comfortable about it. The applicant's self-consciousness at this time may show in various ways—in an over-selling of her beneficence, in anxiety or in cautious quietness; the worker's, in vague undirected discussion, in perfunctory questions, in over-welcoming acceptance, or in an unreasonable refusal. It is within the province of the first interview for the applicant and the worker together to share what is involved not only in the job of caring for foster children but also something of the home study to come, with its whys and wherefores. The interview becomes an opportunity to dispel mystery for the foster mother and to help reduce her psychological resistance to what she may consider red tape.

It is true that no foster mother can get a realistic picture of the job without squarely looking at its distinguishing characteristics first. Being a foster mother is different from being an own mother, a kindly aunt, or

merely a benefactor. It involves a capacity for what might be called nonnatural relationships. For example, to have the day-by-day care of a child intrusted to you, yet have to inhibit your impulse to take complete charge; to love and defend a child who needs you, when this may be discredited by both offensive as well as appreciative own parents; to live according to many agency policies and to divide the responsibility of a loved child with a worker. A sympathetic interpretation of these things should take place early in the contact, for these things comprise a foster mother's unexpected world. The following are excerpts from a first office interview with a prospective foster mother whom the worker considers a promising candidate. The major emphasis in this interview is on an interpretation of some of the factors that are involved in becoming a foster mother.

Mrs. D. said that she discussed the idea of taking a child with her husband and children and that they were all in favor of the plan. At this point I told Mrs. D. something of how children come to us, the visiting of the parents in the foster home, etc. Mrs. D. listened with interest and made some sympathetic comments. She was able to accept the visiting of parents and in fact felt that knowing that its parents are welcome would help the child in its adjustment in the foster home. I then went into the explanation of our role. Mrs. D. said that she was aware of the fact that we visit and she was able to accept this too. In fact she thought it would be very helpful to share her thinking with us. I commented on the possibility of our disagreeing with her. She replied, "All right one can always learn." . . . I indicated at this point that I would like to tell her a little about our board rate, what it is expected to cover, that if she had hoped for any possible financial remuneration from the care of our children, perhaps she would be able to determine more clearly how much there could be after she knew more about this. I explained what the rate was, and said that it was expected to cover food, housing, laundry, haircuts, and recreational expense. I said that we paid shoe repair bills; we supplied medical and dental care, and



clothing for the children. I indicated that our foster mothers had found that with careful management there could sometimes be about \$5 a month left over, but this would depend largely upon the size of their own family. Usually if there was a larger family and where it was not necessary to increase the living quarters of the family for the care of one of our children they were able to have money left over, but this was not always the case, and I added too, that one had to bear in mind that the little bit that was left over could in no way be adequate recompense for the amount of work and responsibility that was involved. Mrs. D. again explained that although she could use the little additional money that would remain in caring for a child, she was not looking for this as a source of income, that if she was she would have rented one of her rooms. She has a large house and many responsibilities; she has to cook and prepare things for a large family. It will, however, give satisfaction to her.

In relation to problems that came up about a particular child, I said the worker from the agency would be visiting and discussing the situation with the foster mother. This too, I pointed out, was different from the way it was with one's own children, where one made one's own decisions with respect to how to handle them and had the full responsibility for their care. In the case of our children the full responsibility does not rest with the foster mother but is shared between foster mother and the agency, and the final decision in case of questions of doubt is usually made by the agency. I explained that whereas this in many cases was something that many of our foster mothers appreciated and considered a help, in other cases they found it hindered them in working with the child. I wondered how Mrs. D. felt about this. She said that she would not like the final responsibility for anything in connection with a child who was not her own, to rest with her. She would look upon the help from the agency as something that she needed and something that she wanted very much.

I made out the application with Mrs. D. and here outlined our process of investigation. Mrs. D. had no objection to our visiting the references and the family physician. She explained that they have all been in good health for the past few years and that they have no family physician. However, they have been using Dr. C., whose office is in the immediate neighborhood, for whatever minor ailments have occurred. I told Mrs. D. to take the application along with her, to read it over carefully and to

return it to us with her own and her husband's signatures. I indicated too that after the application has been received, one of our workers will get in touch with her about visiting her home in order to become better acquainted with her and her family. Mrs. D. said that whoever would come would be perfectly welcome in her home.

I liked Mrs. D. Throughout the interview she seemed perfectly at ease. Her manner is deliberate and outwardly calm, yet warmth comes through. She seemed intelligent, sincere and receptive. I feel that it would be worth while considering this application.

When realities of the job are crowded together in recording, as above, it may leave a negative impression not justified by the worker's acceptance of the applicant. In such a record some of the agency requirements for becoming a foster mother are set out in direct and forthright terms. This is not an attempt to minimize the hard side of the job; but the worker taking responsibility for enabling a foster mother to see what is involved for her. Because of the worker's interpretation the foster mother is able to make a clearer decision concerning the advisability of going ahead with her application, and the worker, in turn, by the quality of the foster mother's response, gets concrete evidence concerning her potentiality.

In visualizing the job ahead for foster parents lies the danger of overdrawing the picture to the point of disheartening any interested person. Merely to present obstacles and realities can be injurious if at the same time no accrediting of the foster mother's personality is there. To identify with the need of the foster parent and at the same time to show her the real difficulties in her way requires no small skill. The relationship between foster parent and worker is a case-work relationship similar to the worker-client relationship; but in the former there

is an additional ingredient—evaluation for use—and in this case the use of the foster parent as a resource in child care. In other words, upon the worker's decision will depend whether or not a person becomes a vehicle of the agency's service, a means of service rather than an object of service per se. When this responsibility of the worker to the foster parent is added to her responsibility for the child there results a total large-scale obligation not easy to accept and with which she always has to come to terms. The weight of this obligation may affect her in various ways. She may want to avoid the responsibility by merely going through the forms of responsibility in a mechanical way (application blank, routine questions, and so forth), or she may place it on the foster mother by building up excessive hurdles for her to surmount. However, the mature worker accredits the personality of the foster mother and accepts the responsibility for evaluation. She is able to refuse many requests because at no time does she refuse the applicant as a person.<sup>1</sup>

Custom has dictated the practice of having one office interview, with the foster mother, who is usually the applicant. Workers are sometimes reluctant to ask her to return for another office interview, because if too many demands are made on her she may elude them by withdrawing. But the homefinding process is not a rigid arrangement. In special cases foster parents might well profit by more than one office interview. People and workers vary in the rapidity with which they make decisions. For the foster parent to know the agency and the worker to comprehend the foster parent in more than one interview would only seem absurd and uneconomical if in the first contact the worker had decided that the

<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on "Refusing Foster Parents."

applicant was not a good prospect. Furthermore, the foster parent who does not wish to return tells us something about her degree of interest, her possible resistance, or our own case-work methods.

The use of the application blank is changing. Traditionally it was a face-sheet only and was given routinely to the foster mother at the end of the first interview as a mark of the worker's approval. Often its content was not mutually discussed at this time. Current practice, in some instances, is now putting the application blank in a more central place in the interview and conceiving of it as something to be shared and talked over by the worker and the applicant. In this way its content becomes a concrete vehicle and starting point for an interpretation of the job as the agency knows it, and for the foster mother a springboard into further questions and knowledge. The time of the foster parent's signing depends upon each individual case. Whenever the signing is done, it symbolizes the foster mother's real desire and willingness to go forward with her application. She might well choose not to sign it in the office, but rather to wait until she has had time to think over the worker's interpretation of the job, to consider it with her husband and family and in a setting where neither the personality of the worker nor the impression of the agency intrudes.

The office interview is the occasion during which the approaching study or investigation of her home is interpreted to the foster mother. It is possible for the case worker to deny this fact to herself and unconsciously to apologize for it to the foster mother. It seems of little consequence whether the homefinding process is called a "study" or an "investigation" as long as we do not hide the fact of its real nature. No one, including the case

worker, likes to be investigated, because of the fear of being denied and the chance that his self-esteem will be damaged. At the same time, the experience of being investigated is common in everyone's life, even though it sometimes involves no more than opening an account in a bank. No amount of finesse deceives the foster parent, nor does it help her. It is more assuring for her if the case worker openly and freely acknowledges the study for what it is. Whether for the foster mother this concept takes on the rigid and negative association so frequently connected with an "investigation" depends to a large degree on the worker's own feeling about it and the projection of this feeling into her behavior. Knowledge that a home is to be investigated can indicate a dignity that is a positive thing, and a purposiveness that redounds to the benefit of the foster parent as well as to the agency. Furthermore, the study in homefinding is distinguished from other "investigations" by its greater mutuality, that is, the worker and the foster parent are each contributing to the knowledge and understanding of each other and of the agency's work.

In the following excerpt the worker frankly discusses the investigation and supervision of her home with the foster mother:

I said there were other things about being a foster parent which we might consider together. Some of them she might like very much and some she might not like. I then told her about the agency set-up, board rate, the fact that we retained medical responsibility and control, etc. I spoke of visits by the social worker and described them as having both positive and negative effects, negative from the point of view of possible intrusion into the family's privacy, reluctance on the family's part to meet our suggestions or requirements in the care of children, positive from the point of view of sharing responsibility with the agency and obtaining help in whatever problems arise in the care of the

child. Mrs. B. accepted this quite readily. She thought the agency did very well to retain this amount of responsibility. She did not think she would object to this at all.

I told Mrs. B. that I had not written to her references or to her doctor, that in this interview I prefer that we should both decide whether we wish to go ahead. If what I told her about the agency and the way we work interested her further in becoming a foster mother, I would then go ahead with references and the rest of our investigation. I told her what this consisted of. Mrs. B. was quite anxious to work with us. She was pleased when I told her that I liked what she had told me about her family.

Explaining the process of investigation in the first interview may create the opportunity to deal early with resistance to it.

Mrs. Y. is an attractive, well-built, tastefully dressed woman of about 42. She was dressed in a befitting manner, with no attempt to appear younger. The striking thing about her is a pasty pallor and practically no make-up. She does not look sickly, however.

Mrs. Y's first words as she stepped into my office were "I feel so queer, so flustered—it's these poor kiddies I saw in the waiting room. I am chicken-hearted. I can't bear misery." I remarked that I know it isn't a pleasant thing coming to apply for something; that maybe she feels a little sorry for herself, too, as well as for the children she saw. Her response was a re-emphasis on her being chicken-hearted and an elaboration of this. She told me in the first place that she is a "social worker of a sort," being actively connected with a few charitable organizations, the kind of organizations that "don't ask questions, don't try to get information, don't disclose names—but give help when and where help is necessary." Secondly, she had been an "investigator" for a children's home in her native city, Baltimore. Here she digressed to tell me that she was born and bred in Baltimore, that she still "belongs there" in spirit. They moved to New York about twenty years ago. Thirdly, that she has been and still is active in a girls' group and considers herself competent with young folks. In fact, even if she says so herself, she is quite adept in dealing with children, boys in particular. She kept on in a steady stream. I interrupted at this point and asked if she was displeased because I asked her to come in after she went to the

trouble of making out an application blank. Maybe she doesn't want to be asked questions and to be investigated and I cannot blame her for feeling that way. There may be other things she may not like. She was a little intrigued but she denied being displeased. What could there be in this business of boarding children that may cause discomfort to herself, to the children, to us? I agreed that all three were involved and suggested that I tell her a little about the way we work and she tell me the way her family live, who comprises it and where our children will fit in. This was acceptable and from this point on there was less monologue, but a real give and take, a working together.

Mrs. Y. tells the case worker how she would like to be investigated—in a nutshell, with few questions, no “red tape,” and a speedy giving of help to her—in this case, a child. The worker is neither afraid of her nor appeasing. She immediately acknowledges the resistance and opposition. She draws these into the open and gives in her words and manner an assurance of blamelessness that is reassuring to the foster mother. Thus Mrs. Y. is free to go on to further considerations.

The office interview is being used more than formerly for foster fathers, particularly in boarding applications, when it is customary for the worker to hunt the father up at home out of his elusiveness. Not infrequently, once case workers really acknowledge his importance, he becomes a partner in the application. It is sometimes not accidental that he has played a secondary role in a situation in which his wife is dominant and the case worker a woman. The foster father is a figurehead only if he is believed to be so. Sometimes his willingness to come to the office cannot be dissociated from his wife's attitude toward him and from his idea of the part he is to play in the plan. His use of the interview, therefore, partially intimates the nature of the family situation. It seems important that he gain an impression of the agency's

consideration of and interest in him early in the application process. Aside from actual consultation with him, minor evidences, such as addressing letters to "Mr. and Mrs.," can be suggestive and convincing. In adoption practice the foster father seems likely to play a more "normal" role. Frequently he accompanies his wife to make application and conducts himself with masculine aggressiveness. Sometimes an adoptive-father applicant may even invade an agency with great urgency and force.

Following is a first interview with adoptive applicants in which the husband dominates the situation. He shows a keen awareness of the responsibility involved for him and is in contrast to the boarding father, whose usual lack of concern in this area may be colored by his knowledge that the agency pays the bills for the child and at no time relinquishes its authority. The tone, color, and content of the first interview with all prospective adoptive parents is conditioned by a knowledge of the amount of responsibility to be assumed by them, of its life-long nature, and that it will be eventually carried out without benefit of an agency.

I received a nicely typewritten note from Mrs. D. signed with her name, stating that they were interested in adopting an infant. She was 31, her husband 38. They had been married for four years. She added that they were both high school graduates with some college education and were healthy, normal individuals. Her husband was manager of a small clothing concern with an average income of about \$3000 yearly and until recently she was employed in the insurance business for a number of years. They have been living in the suburbs for three years.

They came promptly for their appointment. Mr. D., who is a rather short man, nicely groomed and of pleasant appearance, was quite curt in his greeting and eyed me up and down as one might an opponent. His wife was about the same height or perhaps an inch taller. She was a very pleasant, attractive, well-dressed young woman with dark brown hair and gray eyes. She impressed me as being a sweet, gentle person.



After a few introductory remarks I asked her about the possibility of her having her own child or rather addressed this remark to both of them. Mrs. D. answered, saying that she had had an operation to help her have her own baby, but thus far no conception had taken place and she did not want to wait any longer. Later on she told me about the operation in some detail. I learned that Dr. M. had removed an obstruction in the tubes. This is a very difficult, rather unusual operation and Dr. M. is considered an authority in this type of surgery. They had been told that there was now a possibility of her conceiving, but six months had gone by and since this has not taken place, Mrs. D. feels strongly that she does not want to postpone the possibility of having a child in her home any longer. She said this very earnestly and thoughtfully with a good deal of feeling. She knew several social workers who were unfamiliar to me. She had talked with them about the possibility of applying to our agency and they had advised her that this was the one to which they should come.

At this point in our discussion Mr. D. took over the interview and began to ask me a great many questions around adoption, the kind of children we got, how they were referred, almost amounting to a barrage. I answered each one of them in turn with a good deal of detail, explaining how children were referred to us, how we took care of them, the kind of medical safeguards we use, as well as psychiatric care, etc. He asked me in a somewhat belligerent tone why adoptive children should get so much more consideration than children that have to "take chances with life" in their own homes. He had a feeling that this was so because after all we would not place an adoptive child with a family who is on home relief, for example. I explained that the children who are committed to us by the Public Department are really public charges and dependent children. It was expected that an agency like ours would be responsible enough to place the child with a family who can at least afford to take care of a child in order that the child may not again become a community responsibility. He had never thought of it in this way and said so. As I answered each one of his questions, his hostility subsided somewhat. After a while I was able to say to him that he apparently had a good many doubts and questions around adoption. Mrs. D. interposed with "a good many more than she had." I agreed with them that this was so, that she felt more at ease about taking a child through adoption than Mr. D. He said, a little defensively, that he, after all, would

much prefer to have his own child. Neither of them have known people directly who have adopted children, although since they have been thinking about it, they have learned of such situations indirectly where it had turned out very well. Mr. D. wanted a lot of reassurance from me about how adopted children turned out, and I discussed with them both some of the findings in the University in its study of foster children and how they turn out. He expressed a very real interest in this. He then raised some medical questions as to what we knew about parents' diseases and what were the chances of a child inheriting these. I talked with him briefly about these and then asked him whether he had discussed any of this with their family physician. If he did, he might feel he was getting a more objective opinion. They both mentioned eagerly that they had talked with a pediatrician who is a friend of theirs. Mr. D., however, thought it might be a good idea to discuss this further with one of their doctors. The major part of this interview was taken over by Mr. D., with Mrs. D. listening quietly with flushed cheeks. It was not my feeling that he was intentionally trying to hurt Mrs. D. when he expressed an interest in a child of his own rather than in an adopted child, but rather that a naturally cautious individual was asserting himself in being concerned with all the future contingencies which might arise. Mrs. D. said that there was something she would like to say with reference to Mr. D's attitude, which she thought I ought to know in order that I might not get the wrong impression. She said that Mr. D. always greets any new project or any new steps in this same cautious way. No matter how slight a step it might be, it always seems stupendous to him before he can reach a decision. It isn't because he could not really care about a baby that was not his own that he is raising all these objections and questions but rather that it is part of his temperament and nature to greet any new project in this way. Mr. D. listened to this and said that he thought perhaps this was quite true, that he would not want me to get the impression either that he was ruling out the question of an adoptive child. I said I appreciated this also, but that I did think it might be well for them not to enter their application at this time, but for Mr. D. to give himself a little more time to think the whole thing through and perhaps talk to some other people who were not connected with child adoption work and then I would be glad to see them both again. Mrs. D. was a little upset about this, feeling that the delay might cause a greater delay in our con-

sidering their application. Mr. D. was a little upset for her sake, realizing her disappointment, but tried to reassure me that he was really interested in spite of some of the questions he had brought out. I then explained to them that it would in no way set their application further back if they put it in at this time or a little later. Mr. D. seemed very relieved at this and Mrs. D. was then more willing to concur in the present plan. It was agreed that they would talk with a few more people and I suggested a couple of books for them to read, including Brook's book *Adventure in Adoption* as well as Carol Prentice's *An Adopted Child Looks at Adoption*. They said that they would get in touch with me again when they had given the whole matter further consideration. Before they left I explained some of the difficulties in adopting a child and the kind of limitations that most prospective adoptive parents as well as the agency face together. Mrs. D. had a very realistic appreciation of this; her husband probably was a little relieved, in view of his own doubts and questions. I will do nothing further on this application until I have heard from the D's regarding another appointment.

Mr. D., although taking a prominent part in applying for a child, has not really made up his mind to adopt one. He has resistance to the idea as well as fear of it. One feels that he may project his resentment over their inability to have their own child onto the agency, which already "has children" and is able to do so much for them. In other words, Mr. D. is in conflict, which is to say that he is not ready for the step he thinks he wants to take. His application to the agency stimulates his dissatisfaction with regard to not having his own child. His wish to adopt is also offset by his fear of the responsibility, the significance of which he is highly aware. Mr. D., a cautious man, wants to know what this looks like and what it involves for him. His over-emphasis on the need for reassurance reflects the amount of responsibility he knows he is considering as well as his conflict about it. He approaches this as he has customarily approached all

other large ventures—with foresight, prudence, and fear. The worker does not brush aside his caution and questions as unfounded, but draws them out, respects them, and gives him her assurance as to the wisdom of considering this step carefully. She accepts his conflicting feelings and suggests various ways in which he may clarify them. It is significant that Mrs. D. does not feel annoyed with her husband and his questions, but rather defends him to the worker.

The first interview with adoptive parents has certain likenesses to and certain differences from that with boarding parents. In both, the beginning of evaluation appears. In each, the realities to be faced are interpreted. In both situations a relationship with the foster parent is begun and further prepared for. The differences grow out of the characteristics inherent in the nature of boarding and of adoption. In the former the foster parent continues to share the child and the foster experience with the agency whose vehicle she is. In the latter the agency gives up (usually after six months or a year if the placement goes well) its jurisdiction, and the foster parents “walk alone.” Both types of application are characterized by deep feeling on the part of foster parents. In adoptive applications this usually involves a deeper level of the self and implicates the man as much as the woman. The boarding mother is more likely, with experience and supervision, to develop the idea of service to all children. The adoptive applicant maintains throughout more personal motives, although these too result in great service to children. The essential difference lies in the fact that the boarding parent is constantly aware of the child’s ownership by someone else, while the adoptive parent is free to make the child his own.

In the first interview in homefinding the case worker makes use of observation as one of the chief sources of understanding the applicant. This is illustrated in the following record of a case worker conducting a first interview with an adoptive applicant.

Mrs. S. came to the office promptly for her appointment. She is a nicely dressed young woman with soft gray eyes, rather curly black hair and pleasant features. If her face had been less anxious and more relaxed she might have been considered quite attractive. She was apologetic because her husband had been unable to accompany her and was very anxious that this would in no way harm our consideration of them. She had brought his picture in for me to see because "he is so nice." I learned that her husband had recently passed his State bar examination. Plans were completed today for the opening of his new office and that was the reason for his not accompanying her.

With her lips trembling somewhat and her eyes filling with tears she began to tell me that the doctor had only recently informed her that she could not have a baby of her own. From this she went into a long description of the various kinds of medical treatment and care which she and her husband had undertaken in order to have their own baby. Her brother is a doctor as is her husband's uncle. Both have advised them as to suitable medical care, and they have consulted with specialists. Various kinds of treatments and operations have been tried on them. Mrs. S. is not clear in her mind as to just what is wrong with her. One doctor said "her tubes were no good." Another doctor denied this but said that her "tubes were good but that she was otherwise infantile inside." She wept a good bit as she described the various remarks that had been dropped by doctors who have examined her. The kinds of treatments that they have been subjected to have been of a very embarrassing nature at times and she wept as she told me of this. She explained that she had written to us once before, about two years ago, and an application had been sent her. When she showed it to her doctor at that time he had discouraged her, saying what was the sense of applying to an adoption agency when she could have her own child. And again she wept.

Mrs. S. managed to gain control of herself. I purposely turned her attention to other aspects of her situation in order to under-

stand the total picture better and also in order to relieve her. I learned that her father had been married once before marrying her mother. There were two children of his first marriage and seven by his second. Mrs. S. said "I have always been accustomed to a large family and many children around me." Mrs. S. is fourth from the oldest. Her sisters are married and have children. She is the only one of the married children who has no child. Her mother is "unusual" and has always kept the whole family together. There is a "lovely family spirit" and they are known for this all over town. All of them are fond of one another. She said in a rather simple, direct way that her father had been very wealthy before the depression and had lost a large fortune. Her brother was in the fourth year of medical school at the time and the family all joined together without question to help him complete his medical education. Before her marriage, Mrs. S. did secretarial work in New York and enjoyed this. I remarked that I could see her a very competent person in her office job. She smiled a little and said yes, she really was and she had liked to work too. I went on to talk about her housework. I learned that they have a four-room apartment in a six-family house with an extra room all ready for a child. She had purposely taken this larger apartment, hoping that the doctor's treatments would bring results. She likes to bake and cook and does her own housework with the exception of the heavy work, for which she has a woman in once a week. She is known around town for her collection of recipes. I asked her what she did with her time besides taking care of her home. She said that she is very active with a local welfare committee and is chairman of this. She is very much interested in this work. She also has been active with the Red Cross and the rest of the time she has social dates. No one has any idea as to why she has never had a child. They frequently ask her and she says that times are too hard to have children. She says in a small town it would become common gossip and added "you know how girls are." I said I thought she was very wise not to discuss it with people as it would only be disturbing and confusing to her. She said her mother and a few of her siblings are aware of it but they do not discuss it together. Her mother, however, urged her to adopt a child some years ago. She says that it is very strange for her not to have a child in her home, for she comes from a family with many babies and she spoke of her fondness for her nieces and nephews and began to cry again. From various little expressions that Mrs. S. used throughout this discussion I gathered that she came from an

orthodox background, with all the connotations which her barrenness would imply.

She told me again with streaming eyes how terribly fond her husband is of children, how he loves them all and how naturally they take to him, and added that he has never indicated he wanted to part with her because she could not have a baby. She mentioned the movie, "Penny Serenade," and added that her husband would not let her see "Blossoms in the Dust." He felt it was too painful for her. Her husband's brother is 25 years of age; a "halutz" in Palestine. His wife recently had a baby. Her mother-in-law would probably like nothing better than if she adopted a child.

We then talked about the kind of child that she thought they would be interested in. When I asked her about sex she looked at me and smiled and said it really did not matter. She would have no choice as to sex in her own child and it seemed that both boys and girls have their virtues. She would, of course, like a little boy. As to coloring, it really would not matter either because her husband has auburn hair and blue eyes and she has hazel eyes and dark hair. There are also blonds in the family. She had always wanted a little red-headed child. I said that I would suppose having come from an orthodox background it would be important for her to have an all-Jewish child. She said that she had assumed that we only placed Jewish children. As to the background of the child she was almost nonplussed by this question. She had thought only in terms of a nice healthy baby. If we recommended the baby to her that was satisfactory to her. She told me a little of the wonderful adopted child whom our agency placed a year ago with people they knew. He is an unusual little boy and everybody loves him and stops to talk to him on the street.

She thought I ought to know about her husband's present income and business status. His income amounted to \$60-\$65 a week. His law office is only three blocks from her father's restaurant. I told Mrs. S. that I could appreciate what a difficult time she had, that in view of the fact she attempted to put her application in a couple of years ago and has been trying so hard to have a youngster, I would not tell her that it would be necessary for her to wait a long time before we could consider her application. Instead I explained to her that we would keep her application on file and at a time we had a suitable youngster under care we would start our home study. I explained the nature of this.

*Impression:* Mrs. S. is a very simple, earnest, serious young

woman who, under more normal circumstances, I felt, would be quite relaxed with an outgoing type of personality. She has been under so much strain, however, that it was only natural that she would react as she did. Despite her deep disappointment in not having a child, she seems to have sufficient happiness in her marriage to be able to function very comfortably and even with happiness as a wife and young matron.

Observation is the beginning of understanding. It is not just what Mrs. S. says, but the manner in which she talks and behaves that leads to the worker's initial comprehension of her as a person. Here she presents herself as a warm, childlike, and unsophisticated young woman, whose request for a child is the next logical step after having done what she could to have her own. She sounds feminine and as though she enjoyed being so, considering her collection of recipes, her cooking, her interest in children, and her pleasure in family life. Her lack of emphasis on rigid specifications puts a premium on the child for his own sake. If Mrs. S. wants to be like her sisters, all of whom have children, this desire, in degree and quality, is not out of line with her predominantly maternal make-up. Her emotions seem appropriate ones and not hidden from view. It is largely what the worker observes of Mrs. S.'s behavior (the points at which she weeps, her facial expressions, her manner of talking, her placing of emphasis, her attitudes expressed about various subjects, her kinds of response) that gives her an initial "candid-camera view" of her as a person.

The application in homefinding has certain distinguishing features not characteristic of applications for help in other areas of case work. The foster mother, unlike the client does not usually associate her request to the child-placing agency with a need for personal assist-



ance. She is rarely a completely dependent person in the financial sense. Although her need is a personal one, she does not ask the case worker's help with this so much as to give her what she considers, consciously or unconsciously, to be the answer to that need—a child. She has in a sense made a decision and found an answer to her problem before coming, and her actual application is the result of this. Furthermore, the foster mother, in contrast to the client, always comes to the agency feeling that she is offering something to the case worker—her home, herself, her services, and her time. Finally, all prospective foster parents are well aware that the worker will or will not accept their home. Whereas all clients are conscious of whether they are accepted or not by the worker, there is an additional ingredient in the case of foster parents. The so-called “client” is accepted regardless of his “goodness” or “badness” if his need is one that can be met by the agency. Foster parents are accepted for their “goodness” and usefulness only. The client is accepted for himself and his need; foster parents for themselves and their usefulness.

The psychology of the foster parent application may affect the homefinder in various ways. Case workers, like all human beings, need to be needed, and here is a situation in which the foster parent is not aware of needing the worker, but the worker always needs the foster parent in order to carry out her services to children. Furthermore, considering the foster mother's psychology in coming to offer her gifts, the worker may feel a reluctance to intrude into her life and even that she has no right to do this. Finally, the fact that the foster parent is asking, not for money or a job or health services, but for

the actual person of a child for whose life the worker is taking the responsibility adds a type of obligation not often encountered in other case-work settings.

The first interview in homefinding is the beginning of a case-work process which leads either to refusal or to further confirmation of the applicant through subsequent study of the home. It accents the realistic features of the job for the foster parent and the service of the agency, particularly the manner in which this works with foster parents for children. It begins responsibility for selection and evaluation of applicants and preparation for a mutual working relationship, the purpose of which is to create a vehicle for helping with the difficult problems of foster children, to carry out more efficiently the responsibility of the agency, and to support foster parents in a highly exacting job.

The office interview has developed from a routine to a case-work process, in which both worker and foster parent share together the realities of the job and mutually see how these realities coincide with the applicant's needs, desires, and requests.

## *High-lighting the Home Visit*

*THE HOME VISIT* continues and at the same time develops the case-work process begun with the office interview. Its purpose is to know better the prospective foster parents and the members of their family, to observe them in their natural surroundings, and to understand further the quality and the nature of the contribution they may be expected to make. The home visit is not a set routine, but an animated and disciplined experience. It is not getting information for an outline form, but understanding people. It is not an artificial and isolated process, but the culmination of a growing association between worker and foster parent and the consummation of their common purpose.

The inexperienced worker's dilemma in making the home visit is traditional. The home visit puts her in a position which is the reverse of her position in the office interview, for now she is the person who seeks. The fact that she goes to the home, that the foster parent is there to proffer her goods and her "privacy" tends to create in the worker a pressure to receive—in other words, it contradicts the customary need of the case worker to be the giver. The natural impulse of the foster mother to act as hostess may confuse the worker, whose purpose at this time is not only further knowledge but evaluation as well. It is this kind of thing that makes the inexperienced worker feel inwardly apologetic and a little guilty. She

is likely to feel that she is intruding or (because she must evaluate) that she is taking unfair advantage of the generosity and the revealing utterances of "innocent" would-be foster parents. How productive and mutually satisfactory a home visit may be, then, depends first upon the worker's feeling about it. She has to be oriented to a service which she feels is worth while. She has to feel that she has a right and a desire to know foster parents and that she is responsible for so doing. She has to have a ready capacity for identifying with them and at the same time for maintaining her identification with children and with the service of the agency. She has to feel comfortable in what might be called a "self-conscious situation," namely, one in which both worker and foster parent are quite aware that an investigation (sometimes called a "study" or "review") is going on beneath the outward courtesies, the genuine interest of the case worker, and the responses of the foster parent. The more frankly the worker faces this, acts upon it in a natural warm way, and talks about it with ease and honesty, the more helpful the interview will be to both.

The foster mother is neither surprised nor mystified by the home visit. She has been prepared for this in the office interview and has already agreed to it as part of her decision to go on with her application. If a long time has elapsed since the office interview, she is notified by letter when to expect the worker's visit. Whatever the exigency, she is not taken by surprise or caught unexpectedly off her guard—at least, not psychologically, for the earlier attitude of the homefinder has now been renounced in favor of a more straightforward approach, one based on the worker's confidence in her ability to see values beneath outward appearances. The foster mother

expects to show her home to the worker, to introduce her to her own children and her husband, as well as to discuss further her interest in taking a child. She may remember, from the previous interview, that the worker expressed a desire to know her better. Her reaction to this will probably not be thought through but will depend upon her previous experience with the worker. It will also be colored by how comfortable or uncomfortable she feels about letting herself be known.

The practical interest of the worker in knowing a foster parent is not an outgrowth of undisciplined curiosity or gossip. What she wants is knowledge for use. Although evaluation is a factor, the information she seeks is not primarily for purposes of judgment but for understanding. This knowledge concerning a person becomes a basis for the selection of the foster child and for the subsequent use of the foster home. The richest source of understanding prospective foster parents seems to come from a comprehension of family relationships gained through observation and interviewing. Homefinding practice has suffered from a large amount of artificial pumping for information and a rigid faith in outline forms. Dependency on such tools has grown out of the worker's uncertainty as to how and what to observe. When this was accompanied by a heavy sense of responsibility for the placement of individual children, the situation was likely to become difficult for her and the resulting tension would be reflected in her manner, with a consequent embarrassment and awkwardness in the foster parent. The major skill in homefinding is to know what to look for. After all, the crux of the matter is to select normal families—those in which the major basic gratifications have been met in the areas of love and

achievement. It may be argued that in certain adoptive applications, when it is impossible for the couple to have children of their own, this primary gratification has not been met. Nevertheless toward this limitation they may reveal an attitude of maturity or the lack of it.

Normality is something that is hard to define, yet easy to feel and see. In it is assumed a wide range of behavior and attitude, not a narrowly fixed concept. The requirement that foster parents shall be normal does not necessarily mean that they must have a certain degree of culture and education, or wealth, or high position, or perfection of manners and speech, or adequate child-guidance information, or that all foster parents should have children of their own. It does mean that these people have made reasonably satisfactory adjustments to the everyday demands of life. They can hold a job, make and keep friends, marry and enjoy love, and meet the common strains and stresses of life. They are people who, although they want and need a child, actually have enough satisfactions in their lives so that they could go on without one. Such a concept does not rule out foster parents who have needs, because applicants without needs could not be found and lacking these needs they would be unprofitable as foster parents. It is the exaggerated or unreasonable use of these needs that would be detrimental. The need to give and to receive love is universal, but the terms on which it is given and received may be either beneficial or damaging. The foster mother who tries to dominate the agency will dominate the child. The foster mother who (more especially in the boarding situation) can tolerate the prospect of sharing a child with a worker and an own parent is a contrast to one who is unwilling

to let the child grow away from the prevailing pattern of her own life.

The spontaneous discussion of present family relationships, especially catching their emotional tones, is the springboard to the principal substance of the home study. The revelation of attitudes of husbands, wives, and children toward one another creates a total moving-picture before our eyes, one which makes up the vital material of a home. We do not know people by covering a series of formal topics with them (health, education, history, personality, and other subjects). The artificiality of such a procedure is apparent to the foster parent and felt by the worker. Nor does the case worker get a true picture by testing out foster parents by various pointed questions, such as, "What would you do if a child steals, Mrs. So and So?" This kind of thing succeeds in putting the foster mother or foster father on an examination griddle, in the first place because it stresses the need to answer correctly and secondly, it merely secures an answer, not a spontaneous person. If, instead, the case worker can subordinate evaluation at this point and concentrate on knowing a person, she will be working closer to the dynamics of the situation. Such questions spring from a desire to know the applicant's reactions to the real difficulties many foster children bring to foster homes. The case worker will get a truer idea of this not by asking questions so much as by telling applicants in direct, warm, and simple language some of the strains, confusions, and disappointments the children experience in leaving their own parents. The response of foster parents to such stories is more revealing than their answers to catch questions. Apropos of this, there is

such a thing as sensible moderation in the way potential children are described. Good prospective foster parents may be scared off if the pictures are too forbidding; besides, there are no "problem children," only children with difficulties.

The following are selected parts of a foster-home study which includes a home visit and which illustrates the normality of the family relationships and typical family living:

10-6-40 The Goodmans had written to make this appointment and they arrived promptly.

They are an unpretentious looking couple, quietly dressed and with a combination of self-respect and capacity to accept the experience of others that is really delightful. They are intelligent and sensitive and I was very much impressed with their way of handling this interview and their thinking about adoption. Mrs. G. is of medium height, with light hair and even features. Her husband is a tall man, dark in coloring and athletic in build.

Mrs. G. explained that they have been thinking about adoption for a considerable time. They have two boys of their own, Ken, 12 and Bill, 11, and her eyes filled with tears suddenly as she spoke of how much she wanted a little girl. She looked quickly at her husband who warmly took up things at this point and she soon recovered herself. Mrs. G. thinks that when children are little whether they are boys or girls does not make any difference, and she was really not disappointed in her second child being a boy. She assumed there would be more children and that undoubtedly a girl would come to them in time. However, she has not been pregnant since that time and she is now 40 and her husband is 45 so that it is unlikely from this point. They are awfully satisfied with the boys who are as different as can be from each other and very close, but they feel that they need a girl, too. Adoption comes as a plan that has less relation to the boys than to themselves. They wanted to think of what would be the best age child to consider for them and after discussion I left it rather generally at three to six years depending on the particular children that might be available. They said they would not be at all apprehensive about what background a little girl had come from and would assume that they could make



some contribution to her. They seemed to have a realistic conception of what might make a child available for adoption and are not seeking "an orphaned child whose parents had both been killed in an automobile accident," etc. The boys know of their plan and are eager about it. Mrs. G. said they realize there will be some things to work out about this and that their own eagerness for more of a family may raise some problem with their sons.

As I was talking about the home-study they spoke of the problem of references and took up the questions of my interest in medical knowledge about them. Mr. G. thought it was about time they got themselves acquainted with a doctor here and that they had a thorough physical going over for the family as well as my getting in touch with the doctors who have known them so well in the past.

They see next spring as an awfully good time to take a child but would like very much to be considered earlier if there are opportunities for them. I had a good deal of confidence in them as prospective foster parents. Our general procedure was explained to them and an application was given.

10-13-40 Application returned.

1-14-40 I called at the G's by appointment. The house is on the edge of a residential section outside the City. They have a driveway at the side of the house. In front of it there is a long stretch with no houses as far as you can see. Back of the house is clear space for the distance of two or three blocks. The grammar school is close by. The boys have to take a bus to the high school. There are churches of various denominations in the community. The G's are Protestant.

The house has an attractive exterior. It is unpretentious. Inside, too, it gives the same modest impression. It is furnished sparingly but with some special pieces that the family value highly, such as a Capehart. The place has the atmosphere of a real home and does not need any trimmings to create this feeling. Furniture coverings are serviceable in color and seem functional rather than decorative. The individualities of the family members are nevertheless expressed in various ways. Mrs. G., for instance, seemed to be identified by her needle-point work. The boys on the other hand have their airplane models, chemistry set, pingpong table, skates, etc.

Mrs. G. came to the door and welcomed me. She is of medium height and slim. She is a pretty woman having blue eyes and soft curly hair that is cut in a youthful, becoming bob. She was poised

and charming in manner. She talked intelligently and interestingly about the family. She was not boastful but was evidently proud of them.

Much of the conversation revolved, at first, around her boys. She talked about them warmly and seemed to see them as distinct individuals. She said that they have always been very different, both in looks and accomplishments. They have shown very little jealousy because, she thinks, their spheres of interest are so different. Kenneth, who is called Ken, has a definite bent in the direction of aeronautical mechanics while William, called Bill, is better at his studies.

I asked Mrs. G. what the boys were like when they were little. Ken was rather a difficult baby. She was physically uncomfortable before he came and she thought that was usually true of first babies. When he was an infant nothing was safe within his reach. Mrs. G. put everything away and as a result said that the house looked like a furniture store. When Bill came along two years later she was so well during the pregnancy and the delivery was so easy that she could hardly believe it. He was no trouble after his arrival and by that time anyway she knew that babies could be trained to behave. She said that Bill has never been any trouble since, either.

Mr. G. was very little help with the boys as infants but as soon as they got out of that stage he was helpful and interested. From the way Mrs. G. talked, it sounded as if this were a very companionable family. She told how they go on picnics together and play games every Sunday afternoon. Mr. G. and the boys are particularly interested in tennis and play with each other. Mrs. G. said she is noticing a growing admiration of the boys for their father. They are now more critical of her than they used to be. She told how Bill objects to her wearing a hood or a bandana on her head when she takes Mr. G. to the station in the morning. He said that everyone will look at her. She seemed understanding of his reaction at the same time that she was missing him, because he is growing up. She would probably enjoy the identification of a girl with herself since Mr. G. has the boys. Mrs. G. talked about her husband and the boys as if she liked and enjoyed them. She seems to take them for granted.

Mrs. G. said spontaneously that she and her husband would love to have their own little girl. This is not likely, however. Six years ago she was in an automobile accident and received abdominal injuries. Mrs. G. said it was the only serious thing that

had happened to her in their married life. Dr. F. treated her at that time. She mentioned in connection with him that she hesitated to give him as a reference as he is so dilatory in matters of this kind. She was not surprised to hear that I had not had a reply from him yet. As a result of Mrs. G's injury the doctors felt that she could not have a child again. This was the opinion of Dr. M., who gave her a general examination last year. It was after they had him that they decided to go ahead with the adoption.

This led to Mrs. G's talking about the health problems in the family. These have not been serious in nature. The children have had all of the children's diseases, including two different kinds of measles. Ken had a broken arm and Bill a tonsillectomy. Mrs. G. said "Jim has a rugged constitution." They have really needed a doctor very little and have therefore not established any connection with one here in the City.

I asked Mrs. G. if she would like to tell me about herself and her husband. I said that I was interested and she went on—

Mrs. G. was born 6-5-01 in ———. Her family moved from there only a few months after she was born and settled in ———, where she grew up. She had an older sister. Mr. G. lived in the same town and was a friend of her brother's. He used to visit in their home as a child. She said he made no impression on her at first because he was so quiet and sober looking. Even now that is the way he impresses people when they first meet him. She described him as very different from her in temperament, being slow and deliberate, whereas she is quick in getting things done. She said she gets impatient with him sometimes but she, nevertheless, appreciated his thoroughness and reliability. They went to school together and Mrs. G. finally caught up with him because he started late. She first went to a small college in ——— and from there to the State University, where she got her degree. She majored in nursing and from time to time mentioned that she was sorry that she missed the cultural subjects but her friends have assured her that she has a much more practical foundation for her job as wife and mother than these cultural subjects would have afforded. She said she has certainly used all her education in a practical way. She went to Y University here also and took some graduate work in nursing. She wished that she might have used her education professionally but instead has made good use of it in the home.

Mr. G. attended a technical school while she was at the State

University. They were married on 6-25-1926 in their home town. She said she thought at the time that it was wonderful for them to get married as students, but she thinks now they might have waited. Mr. G. was not really able to provide for a family and she thought that the children came when she was quite young. Ken was born in October 1929 and Bill in December 1930. They lived in ——— until Mr. G's promotion brought them here in 1939. Mr. G. seems to enjoy his work. She said they were both awfully pleased with the fact that he does not have to travel now. Previously he was away from home from time to time but now that is not necessary. They chose their present locality because of its fine schools and because of friends there.

The boys came home while I was there and met me very easily. They talked in a natural way about school, its teams and activities. They look like regular boys. They were comfortable throughout the visit and seemed self-possessed. Ken is tall, has light wavy hair and blue eyes. He is rather loosely hung and a bit awkward. Bill, on the other hand, has dark straight hair and brown eyes with smooth skin. He seems mentally quicker than Ken and has a good sense of humor. He is a rather handsome looking boy.

From the talk about school the conversation touched on the subject of girls. The boys were amusing and natural in their reaction to them. Bill thinks that the girls in their town are much better looking than the girls where they lived previously but that was because he wasn't in junior high school there. He was in the 7th grade. Mrs. G. agreed with him that the 7th grade is not "the girl's year." They are in an in-between stage. In regard to having a sister, they both thought it would be "O.K." as long as she "could take care of herself." Baby carriages had no appeal for the boys.

Mrs. G. let the boys have the floor. She was apparently at ease and interested in how they were conducting themselves. They expressed a normal feeling of superiority over the other sex, and a noticeable identification with their father as the man of the family. This was particularly plain in a story about Susy, their collie. Ken explained that the dog had been after some small animal under a neighbor's porch. He said "Half of us thought it was a rabbit and the other half, that is, mother, thought it was a field mouse." Of course the men were right. In another instance, Mrs. G. was telling how the boys sang in the Glee Club. Ken and Bill made a grimace in a truly boyish fashion.

Ken said he is a patrol leader in the scouts and Bill is in his patrol. They are working on some material for display purposes in one of the local store windows. They seem to enjoy this activity together. They are expecting to go to a Father-Son Banquet very soon and Mrs. G. is going to serve so that she can be present, too. There was some pleasant talk about swimming and the fine beaches here which Mrs. G. and the boys enjoy.

Mrs. G. served tea. She poured and Bill served. The boys took this without any confusion or strangeness and there was no interruption in the flow of the interview. They seemed to accept me easily.

I had not had an opportunity to ask Mrs. G. for additional references before the boys came home and suggested that she and her husband think about this. She discussed it, however, with the boys. They suggested one new reference. There was some discussion among them about the length of time that these people knew the G's and Mrs. G. seemed to accept the boys' suggestions and to credit them.

Before going I asked to see the house. The boys took a good deal of pride in pointing up the high spots. Ken's room was full of airplane models. Mrs. G. had selected curtains designed with various sport activities to decorate the windows in both boys' rooms. Bill's room is to be used for the little girl and he told me that it was small but cozy. I asked him if he would mind giving it up. He showed no resentment about having to leave it, but on the other hand said he wanted the bed room on the first floor which Mrs. G. described as "the choicest room in the house." Mrs. G. told me that the cellar was the center of the boys' activities and suggested that they show me around. They did so. One of the coal bins has been transformed into a work shop for Ken. It contains a radio and more airplane models. Bill has a tool chest here. The ping-pong set is also in the cellar. The boys spend a great deal of time here and they seem to have a good deal of lee-way in their activities.

Mrs. G. said that I could see her husband at his office or he would call at the agency. She said that he is just as excited about the possibility of adoption as she is. In talking about the child she had no specific requirements to make. She said that any coloring would be acceptable since they have a wide range in their own family, going from flaxen to black hair. As regards intelligence, she said they are all "just average" and would not expect the little girl to be outstanding.

12-14-40 Mr. G. in the office. When I had called him I asked which would be most convenient, this office or his. He said "If you're going to put me on the carpet, I'd better come over to your office."

Mr. G. is of moderate size, dark in coloring, with brown eyes and hair. He has a rather noticeably wide smile. He is quiet in manner but has a good sense of humor and is easy to talk to.

He said that he knew he had come to give information but that he had a few questions to ask me too. He started off by assuring me that he and Mrs. G. had thought things out thoroughly before they undertook their application here. They wanted their own little girl, but when they found this impossible, they decided to adopt. He talked about the accident Mrs. G. had. At first she could not move because of her injuries. She was in bed for three months. Dr. F. had a specialist work with him on the case. Mrs. G. has implicit faith in him and she has made a wonderful recovery. She had "the jitters" when she first got up but he thought that was perfectly natural. She has since been in perfect condition.

Mr. G. said he and Mrs. G. have been thinking more about a little girl they would like. Since discussing the matter with the boys, they have decided that a girl between the ages of five and six would fit in very well. He wondered whether the agency thought it strange that they would be interested in a child of this age, whether it would take longer to get one and whether girls of this age are scarce. I explained that the agency will take into consideration the family's own wishes and the needs of the children who are available. Mr. G. does not believe in making a child work but on the other hand there are routine tasks in the home which his own boys perform and he thinks it would be wise for the little girl to do her share. Mr. G. seemed to have some question as to how the agency would react to this. I discussed this with him in the light of our interest in having the child have a normal place with the rest of the family.

He then brought up some questions of coloring and background. He said he did not feel that it would be necessary to be too specific in his demands and yet he thought of a friend who had adopted a child whose coloring was so totally different that she did not seem to fit at all. He wanted their child to be more or less like them.

Suddenly he said, "I suppose you people think I am taking a lot on my shoulders to assume responsibility for another child

on my salary." I asked him how he felt about it and he said that he is well satisfied, that he can "handle things." He has had a dozen or more raises in the six years that he has been in his present position and he is expecting further advancements. He talked of how he had worked for over 12 years for an engineering firm. This organization made studies on city planning and made suggestions towards economy. When the depression came his firm went out of existence. Mr. G. was out of work for a while and then located with his present engineering firm. There are no very large salaries in the corporation. He said he can manage comfortably on his present salary of \$5000. Their rent is \$65 a month, they own their own car and have no debts. He is insured for \$20,000 including some annuity policies. Mrs. G. is insured for \$5,000. The boys are not insured. He says he doesn't believe in it for them. He owns 15 shares of the company's stock worth about \$20 per share, and has 10 or 12 \$50 Postal Savings Bonds.

In response to my interest in his own personal history, Mr. G. told this simply and straightforwardly. He was born in a small town, March 1898. His father had already gone to ——— to "stake out a claim." His mother stayed with her mother until after Mr. G. was born. They soon joined his father and Mr. G. and his younger sister were brought up on a farm. They lived away out of town and as a result he did not start school until he was 8 years of age. He was in Mrs. G's brother's class.

When the first World War broke out he enlisted. While overseas he humorously told of how some of the fellows who had engineers' training seemed to have a "soft snap" of it. He decided to go to engineering school. He did so but did not want to leave Mary (Mrs. G.) since she was getting too much interested in some of the other town boys. He therefore married her.

Mr. G's own parents worked hard on the farm. He said his father never knew when to stop. As a result he developed rheumatism. His mother had a mild heart condition. For a while they lived in ——— for health reasons but were never very happy there, so returned home where they still are.

I asked Mr. G. about Mrs. G's family and he said her father died recently of a stroke. Her mother is now living with Mrs. G's sister, who is married to a doctor and has a large family of children.

Mr. G. evidently enjoys being with his boys. He talked modestly about their accomplishments and seems proud of them. He told of going to a Boy Scout function last night although there

was a terribly heavy storm. He made no complaint, even though the car had to be taken to a garage because the snow had gotten into the engine. He said, "I help the boys out because there are so few men in the community who are interested in Boy Scouts." He thinks it is a healthy outlet for the boys and was interested in how Ken seems to be developing leadership which they had not been aware of before.

He wanted to know from me how long it would take before they could expect a child. I told him that we have his family in mind in relation to the little girls who are under our care now and would let them know as soon as there was any one that seemed to fit their need.

This family has a healthy ring to it. There is mutuality between husband and wife, a "we" attitude and a joint consideration that one feels is not put on but the outgrowth of satisfied years of living together. They have made good terms with each other, not as a matter of theory, but because of mutual satisfaction, common liking, and a mature acceptance of each other. They are free to disagree, even to get annoyed with each other. Sometimes Mrs. G. is impatient with his slowness; but the amount of frustration (common to all people who live together) is outweighed by the satisfactions experienced.

Both Mr. G. and Mrs. G. accept their respective masculine and feminine roles. The division of labor between them is a normal one, and they both like being what they are—a man and a woman.

The boys present a typical picture of the preadolescent, with his scorn of girls and his correspondingly heightened notion of his own importance as a man. Their criticism of their mother, her mode of dress and manner, and their identification with their father is salutary and characteristic. Mrs. G. shares every woman's regret at this, but also takes pride in the budding inde-



pendence of her sons. She has enough satisfaction and security not to feel hurt and not to obstruct their growth.

The request of Mr. and Mrs. G. for a little girl is not a neurotic demand for satisfactions denied them, but an appeal for further normal satisfactions already experienced. Mrs. G. wants a girl not only for herself but also for her husband and the boys and as a fulfillment of a maternal need, denied her for an objective reason (the automobile injury). She is a woman who, already loved and gratified, does not have to have a child to make up to her for a lack of affection. The attitude of Mr. and Mrs. G. toward the worker and the agency is direct and forthright. Their most striking characteristic is their freedom to be natural and easy. Neither is protective, and neither is afraid the other will "give him away"; in other words, they are sure of each other. Their joint application has significance and is expressive, one feels, of the way they do things together.

In the above situation the worker's skill lies in what she observes—attitudes, relationships, tones of voice, and the manner of talking about various subjects. Her way of doing this also indicates skill. She is easy, comfortable, and interested. Neither Mr. or Mrs. G. are confused by her personality, her questions, or her "investigation," nor are they afraid of her.

It has been said above that there is a wide range and scope in normality, not just a strict conformity to a rigidly fixed pattern of behavior. Sometimes husbands and wives do not show as clear a picture of a mutual relationship as they do in the above case illustration, yet at the same time their relationship may be satisfactory to both husband and wife and within the range of normality. In the following case, Mrs. Mackay, 45, applies to a child-

placing agency for one or two pre-school children to board, preferably a girl, although she would take boys also. She has three children of her own, two boys, now married and in their own homes, and Sally, thirteen, ready for high school next term. The worker pictures Mrs. M. as a warm, very maternal woman who has always helped her neighbors when they were in trouble. They have confidence in her and turn to her when illness or other difficult situations occur. Sally appears to be an active, normal girl, sure of her mother and father and of their interest in and liking for her.

Before the worker sees Mr. M., Mrs. M. speaks of him as "dad" and describes with pride his many community interests. He is manager of a Soft-Ball Club and evidently gets much satisfaction out of his contacts. Mrs. Mackay says "dad has been awfully good to me" and, warmly, "we have been married for 25 years now." The worker feels that Mrs. M. wants a child to board in order to perpetuate the kind of maternal satisfaction she gained from her own children when they were little.

Mrs. M. has a financial incentive also. Her husband makes \$40 a week as a bank guard. They own their own home, a modest, practical suburban dwelling. Although they are not in financial need, they could not afford to take a child without remuneration. The worker feels that Mrs. M's financial interest is subordinate to the acquisition of other satisfactions.

The worker goes to see Mr. M. by appointment at his home in the evening. The following excerpts are parts of the three-cornered interview:

Mr. M. was standing outside waiting for me. I introduced myself and asked if this was Mr. M. He answered, "Who else?" in a definite manner. He is a short, square, athletic-looking man with thinning blond hair and a closely cropped mustache. He asked

me to come in and called to his wife with a "she's here." He then sat down and looked closely at me. Mrs. M. came in, put her hand on his shoulder and said with a smile, "This is Dad." Mr. M. looked slightly embarrassed and made some comment about the weather. He then turned to me and said, "What's the dope?" Mrs. M. looked to see my reaction and seemed relieved when I smiled. I told Mr. M. I was interested in how he felt about having a child in his home to board. He said abruptly, "It's *her* business." I asked if he thought it was just as important for a child to have a father as well as a mother. He relaxed a little at this and said "You're telling me!" From this he went into a long discussion of his own boys, how he was "a pal" to them, how they still come to him for advice. Even his daughter does this. He likes all the kids in the neighborhood and he often goes out and plays ball with them. Mrs. M. put in how the neighbors often ask her to "take in" their children when they are away. Mr. M. quickly and defensively put in, "but we don't take money for them. We do it because we like to help out and we like the kids." I said that our board rate is small. It never really pays for the service foster parents give. It can't be considered a money-making proposition at all—in fact when money is a major consideration there are more profitable ways of making it. Mr. M. seemed more comfortable at this and began to describe his work with the Boy Scouts. He also is the manager of the local men's soft-ball team. He described their games and how he had aroused local interest in this sport. Many families (husbands, wives and children) attend the games and sometimes they come and spend the whole Sunday or holiday at their clubhouse. As he talked about his exploits he would turn now and then in an affectionate way to his wife for confirmation which she gave.

Mr. M. then turned to me suddenly and said, "What kind of children do you have? I don't want one that's going to be a nuisance." I said I couldn't guarantee this—but what did he mean by a nuisance? Discussion brought out that he wouldn't want a sickly child—a "puny one." He wants a child who could go around with him sometimes—also he thinks they shouldn't be feeble-minded. I discussed the responsibility the agency takes in fitting the child into the foster home, considering the wishes of foster parents, etc. At the same time all children can be nuisances and difficult. They do take much time and attention and being a foster parent is not easy. It is because of this that we share the job with them and so we can help. Mrs. M. put in, "You see Dad,

Miss X. will come to see us every now and then and we can talk things over with her." Mr. M. looked serious and said "Well, that's different. I just don't want trouble I can't get out of." Mrs. M. looked a little anxious at this and I went on to discuss further what supervision meant—a teamwork job, working together on a common responsibility. Mr. M. then looked approvingly at me and said, "That's O.K.—what kind of a child do you recommend for us?" This was discussed. Both Mr. and Mrs. M. responded to the idea of a 6 or 7 year old girl or boy. Mr. M. smiled at his wife and said, "How about another little girl?" I brought the conversation around to the M's own children and asked about some of their experiences in raising a family. This brought out a discussion of various early difficulties they had had. Mr. M. told of Harry's slowness in school, Roy's fights in the neighborhood, Sally's shyness—"They are nice kids but they aren't perfect and they have turned out O.K." They talked quite matter-of-factly about these things and I felt Mr. M's real interest in his children and Mrs. M's patience. Mr. M. brought in a picture album with many snap-shots of the children at all ages. Occasionally they would disagree about the time or place of the picture, Mr. M. being definite and outspoken. Mrs. M. would disagree with him and finally Mr. M. would come around and say, "Yeh, I guess you're right."

As I was leaving Mr. M. helped me on with my coat and said, "Well, do I make the grade?" Mrs. M. broke in with, "Now, Dad—." He turned to her, put his arms around her and said to me smilingly, "You know, I've been married to this little woman for 25 years and she always keeps me straight." Mrs. M. looked pleased and I said I thought they would "make the grade."

On the basis of this interview plus the total social study Mr. M. is seen as a less mature and less secure person than his wife; at the same time he has been a real father to his children and a good husband to his wife. That his wife wants to take a child to board, even with his consent, threatens his masculine pride as an adequate provider. This is frequently true with boarding applicants when the wife's ability to earn money makes public the actual or fancied financial inability of the husband. One feels in this particular situation that Mr. M., not meeting his own demand of himself as the suc-

cessful business man, compensates for this, to his satisfaction, in the athletic and Boy Scout activities he undertakes. He continues his masculine strutting in the presence of the worker and Mrs. M. Does this reveal an explosive temperament which results in a tense relationship between husband and wife? Is it possible that when they are alone talking over the question of boarding a child the same sort of thing takes place? Mrs. M's attitude throughout this interview is characteristic. She knows her husband—she has lived with him for twenty-five years. She is anxious not so much because she fears that he may spoil her plans by saying the wrong thing to the worker, but is concerned that perhaps the worker may not see all the good traits of this man she knows so well. He isn't perfect, true, and sometimes he puts his worst foot forward, but after all he is lovable and he has been awfully good to her. The relationship of this wife to her husband is of a maternal nature. Mrs. M. is the tactful, protecting mother, and Mr. M. is not only a husband and a father but also her child. Their mutual satisfaction in this relationship has brought three healthy children into the world and allowed them freedom to grow and to become independent personalities. If the worker had not seen the meaning behind their outward behavior, she might have been misled into withdrawing from a home which actually became a useful one for the agency. Mr. M's bluntness and caution are directed not against his wife, but against the agency, whose policy of paying for child care hurts his estimation of himself as a money-maker. The worker's interpretation of "board" as a "minor consideration," and her emphasis on a child's real need of a father relieves Mr. M's anxiety.

The knowledge the worker gains from her under-

standing of Mr. and Mrs. M. enables her to select for this couple the case of a child and a parent with whom it was reasonable to presume they could succeed. She chooses a widower who is devoted to his child, a little girl of four and one-half years. He is a young man and is looking for a fatherly adviser. His child does not present abnormal difficulties. Mr. M. comes to like this father and accepts him much as he does his own boys, and Mrs. M., by means of this child, gains another outlet for an abundant capacity for mothering.

At the end of the above interview the worker tells Mr. and Mrs. M. that their home will be approved. She is able to do this because the home study is successfully completed with this visit. References (used by this agency) have already been interviewed and reveal the family's popularity in the community. Other visits to the home have already enabled the worker to make up her mind about Mrs. M. and the children. Much importance is attached by foster parents to the agency's decision, and it is to their advantage that they be told as early as possible whether they have been accepted or rejected. Formal acceptance was given shortly in letter form to Mr. and Mrs. M. Sometimes a would-be foster parent will press a worker for a decision sooner than it can be given, and this pressure may be so marked that it reveals an anxiety detrimental to the placement of a child. In each individual situation the worker needs to be aware that in the course of her study she is being led to accept or to reject, that she may be giving a favorable impression to the foster parent when she is unfavorably inclined, which is unfortunate for everyone and points to the importance of refusing foster parents at the earliest time possible if refusing them is indicated. The prolong-

ing of foster-home studies beyond the time when an unfavorable decision has been reached is never justified.<sup>1</sup>

In homefinding there is one aspect of the relationship of foster parents that is usually evaded to a striking degree in the interviews—namely, the marital relationship itself. Is this not the case worker's business? Is this a subject from which she feels prohibited? Has it anything to do with placing a child? The frequent omission of this topic is all the more significant because it is so basic to understanding the persons. What worker would deliberately place a child in a home where this relationship is unsatisfactory? The practical problem of how to obtain this information revolves around the total family picture presented and an understanding of what to look for in this. Many parents reveal the satisfaction of their normal marital relationship in their manner of speaking about each other, in their mutual interests, and in their healthy outlook on life. Others reveal tensions and frustrations which raise doubts about this. In the latter situations the general impression is too little, and the case worker, if she is free to do so, takes the responsibility for obtaining more specific information. When the foster parents are reserved it is usually difficult for the worker. Her own fear or inhibition is added to that of the foster parents, and the result is an accumulation of self-consciousness all around. The most important factor in acquiring this information is the worker's own ease, relaxation, and naturalness in discussing the subject. If she feels guilty, if she is thrown into a panic, if she feels she is invading the foster parents' privacy, she cannot be helpful, nor can she get helpful material. Sometimes the

<sup>1</sup> Further discussion of refusing prospective foster parents follows in the chapter entitled "Refusing Foster Parents."

worker is concerned lest what she may learn will make it impossible for her to use the home. Has she led these people on to disqualify themselves, so to speak? Such a situation for the case worker is apparent not only in relation to sex but also in relation to other areas of the foster parents' life. Nevertheless, the marital relationship is usually the subject about which the parents are most sensitive. The psychological safeguards of the worker are her own ease in discussing sex, her sincere conviction that she wants to help children, her real interest in foster parents, and her belief in and identification with the purposes of the child-placing agency.

The marital relationship is a subject not apart from, but inherent in the fabric of the foster parents' lives. It frequently follows in natural sequence subjects which the foster mother herself brings up—her disappointment in her inability to have her own baby; her desire to have another child in addition to her own; her husband's treatment of her; the story of her marriage; the kind of help on the subject of sex which she experienced from her own mother; her children's problems and questions about sex; and so forth. The ingenious worker can often fit her questions into this sequence in a natural way without abruptly startling a shy foster parent. It has been said that a man and his wife with neurotic difficulties in their marital relations can work out a reasonably satisfactory adjustment to each other and in so doing can give a good life to a foster child. This statement suggests that marital relationships are either black or white, whereas in reality such relationships may be very delicately balanced. While the case worker without psychiatric guidance cannot recognize the milder neuroses, she would not choose as foster parents persons showing the overt ones.



The relationship between husband and wife has crucial significance for the child to be placed. In addition, relationships between foster parents and their own children (if they have children) loom large in any social study. Again a revelation of normality is what the worker is looking for, but with this she should know and accept the fact that every parent rejects his child at times.<sup>2</sup>

The following material is taken from the home visit to a prospective boarding home. Mr. and Mrs. V. have two children—Buddy, five, and Bessie, two.

Mrs. V. came out into the yard to greet me. From the first she was very cordial and unusually poised for a person so young. She is rather small and trim looking, was dressed in a clean cotton housedress, sandals and socks. Her dark hair has a permanent wave and she had it nicely arranged with a becoming little red ribbon band to hold it in place. She wears glasses. Bessie is the little two year old daughter. She has a round, plump face, blue eyes, light straight hair, pink and white complexion and very winsome ways. I was particularly impressed with the confident way in which she came up to me. Throughout the visit all of Bessie's relationships with me and with the family bore out my first impression that she expects warmth and friendliness from the world.

Even though Mrs. V. was interested in talking about the stock and farm life there was no question but that her chief interest was her husband and her two children. Buddy goes to kindergarten. Mrs. V. hoped that I could stay long enough to see him. She thinks both children look like their father and she seems glad of this. There was a loving pride in her manner as she brought out a small album of pictures of Buddy taken from the time he was born on down to the present. She told me about Buddy's progress in school and showed me the report cards that he had gotten all year. Later Mr. V., too, in his way showed pride in Buddy's achievements. On his last report the teacher had written on the back that she just wanted to tell Mrs. V. how much they enjoyed Buddy at school and said that she imagines that his mother and father must be very proud of him. She told how well he got on with other children and how much they seemed to like him. She said that when a new pupil comes Buddy takes it

<sup>2</sup> Levy and Munroe, *The Happy Family*, p. 257.

as his responsibility to show the new pupil around until he gets acquainted with things. All his marks were satisfactory—in fact marked “1,” which is high, but on the last two reports he has taken up singing and rhythm and both times he has gotten “2.” He said to Mrs. V., “Mother I just can’t make higher than a 2 on those,” but she told him it didn’t make any difference.

Mrs. S. said that before Buddy was born, Clyde, her husband, had wanted a girl so when Buddy was a boy she bought him a girl Cocker Spaniel. She laughed with fond amusement as she recalled Mr. V’s comments when he had to pay \$8 to have her “spaded.” All of Mrs. V.’s comments about the sex life connected with animals were very natural and free, yet when asked about their plans for having other children there was a shade of embarrassed restraint. She said they didn’t plan to have any right away, saying that this was principally because of world conditions and the lack of money. I asked if they used birth control methods and she mentioned a little more freely that they did, and added “My husband is very good to me.” There was every indication that they are mutually fond of one another. She in many ways leaves the impression that he is the head of the house and that she has tremendous respect for his ability. She called him into the house when the discussion was about children whom we place in foster homes, to hear about some of the situations and some of the problems which arise.

In interpreting some of the problems of children who are placed away from their own parents, it seemed hard for Mrs. V. to grasp the difficulties in living with children presenting such problems. Her manner indicated that she felt pained over children’s misfortunes and unhappiness. Once when we were discussing the necessity for children to have certain responsibilities around the home, Mrs. V. pointed out to me that Buddy had raked the yard. He is very slow and awkward, of course, but she added affectionately,—“He gets it done.”

Mrs. V. sat on the daybed and patted or fondled Bessie when the latter tumbled around her. Mrs. V.’s attitude toward Bessie was consistently affectionate and approving and while most of the time she talked with me without interruption, she would occasionally give Bessie a little special attention in the form of a pat or a tender smile intended just for her or to draw her into the group. Bessie wandered in and out of the house at will but Mrs. V. had to open the door for her each time since the doors were closed. She was always gay with her, and called goodbye as she closed the door. She imposed necessary limitations on Bessie’s

behavior. For instance, once Bessie lolled on a chair and over the dining table. This was apparently acceptable to Mrs. V. but when she tried to put a leg on the table Mrs. V. told her not to do this. As Mrs. V. put her sweater on before letting her go out in the damp she cautioned Bessie not to go in the water "or else"—this added playfully. Bessie accepted the caution in the way in which it was given and apparently obeyed since she seemed to be dry always on returning. She frequently came back chewing on rhubarb stalks and Mrs. V. gave approving acceptance until the child had obviously had enough and was wasteful with a stalk, when Mrs. V. took it from her, told her she should not waste it, said they would save it for the pigs. I noted that Mrs. V. did not make any indiscreet remarks about Bessie in the latter's presence. She said she thought they had tended to spoil her, having Buddy give in to her. Now she is taking advantage of this pattern and they are having to reverse it. Bessie has developed a little temper and makes a fuss but they try to ignore the temper unless she becomes too noisy, when they send her out. She may go to the head of the stairs, sit there a few minutes and return and indicate to her mother that she is all right again.

Mrs. V. told about the hours immediately preceding Bessie's birth, when she insisted on waiting several hours after pains began, and eating a heavy meal before going to the hospital as she was not going to starve that time! In reminiscence both experiences had evidently been amusing and pleasurable. When talking of Bessie's birth she patted her warmly as she rolled around on the couch by her.

Buddy is a handsome little redheaded boy, has a peaches and cream complexion, a good figure and appears to be in good health. When he returned from school he came to meet me, and without any gesture of introduction began to talk in a friendly poised fashion about things around the place, including his bunnies and his mother's rose bush. He does not get home from school until after 4 p.m. and I had only a few moments of his company before I had to leave.

I saw a mild display of temper when Buddy was demonstrating his skill with marbles. Bessie took one marble and made a fuss when Buddy tried to get it back. In an aside Mrs. V. called my attention to the display while Mr. V. suggested that Buddy let Bessie play with the marble "a little while." Buddy said he wanted to play with it, but capitulated, and Bessie remarked erroneously that it was her marble. Buddy had seemed very manly and self sufficient until now, when he began in a

somewhat babyish fashion to ask his mother for a piece of candy. He continued in this babyish fashion for the few remaining moments I was there, and as I drove away I saw Mrs. V. and Buddy running hand in hand to the truck where the candy sack was.

The obvious security and confidence of Bessie is not accidental but a reflection of her parents' attitude toward her. She shows that she feels at ease with grown-ups because of what she has already experienced with them. She has learned that her parents are loving, to be counted upon, and pretty reasonable. Buddy is jealous (what child isn't?), but the normal satisfactions he is getting from his mother and father make it bearable and even beneficial.

The attitude of Mr. and Mrs. V. toward Buddy and Bessie results from their liking, loving, and respecting each other. They have a solid and healthy relationship, because of which the children benefit. Also here one sees a satisfactory and presumably normal marital adjustment, the gratification of which spreads out fanwise into all areas of their life. Mr. and Mrs. V. not only like their children, have a natural pride in them, and enjoy them but also have no uneasy conscience about them. As a result they are able to discipline them without feelings of guilt or passion. In the use of record material such as this one runs the risk of having the reader feel that all normal families are like this, whereas, after all, there are many combinations of individual qualities and feelings that make healthy people, and no two homes are alike. At the same time, certain basic values should obtain in all homes—reasonable relaxation, satisfaction, and interdependence between husband and wife and consequent gratification in and acceptance of their own children—which, of course, does not mean absence of problems.

In the past homefinding has emphasized the getting of historical material from prospective foster parents. It still does in varying degrees. This has often been merely factual data which oriented the worker to the historical framework of the foster parents' life. Facts such as birthplace, schooling, number of brothers and sisters, their present location, business and marital status, and so forth, were meant to reveal the kind of life lived by the foster parents. Many times such data was and still is mechanically used as an end in itself and as a substitute for knowing the person but background material need not be a blind-alley. Its purpose is not to validate or to invalidate a person, but for greater understanding of him or her today. The past, present, and future of a person are all parts of the dynamics of his living. The historical facts alone have no exceptional magic; the foster parents' feeling about these facts is the gist of the situation. How disappointments and frustrations have been met before, what satisfactions have been enjoyed, what achievements and fun have been experienced are really clues to a personality and the kind of terms a man or a woman has made with life. Foster parents should decide to talk about these things with a worker, not in response to pumping, but in order to share their experiences with a worker whose natural interest is evident. The trouble with history is not history in itself but that it is so often too routine in the getting. The worker has frequently strung together a lot of facts, overlooking the foster parents' feeling about the facts. For example, a worker may learn that Mrs. Y.'s mother died when she was eight and yet not know how the loss really affected Mrs. Y. Or a worker may be told that Mr. X. plays golf every Sunday; this is not important unless she sees his

wife's resentment in being home alone all day or, on the other hand, her pleasure in his interest. Perhaps Mrs. X. herself belongs to a bowling club and has to "dash off" from home soon after dinner on Wednesday nights. It is not just what has happened in people's lives so much as the way they feel about and have met what has happened. In the final analysis the foster parent as he is today (combining a past life, a present adjustment, and aspirations for the future) is the person to be lived with. The present situation of foster parents is a natural starting point from whence comes significant early material that enlightens the present and becomes of maximum value in the use of the foster home. Adults are likely to repeat with foster children and their own children the way they themselves were raised as children. Admiration for the kind of parents they had may influence them, or the reverse may happen; that is, a right-about-face in order to assure for a foster child attitudes and advantages they themselves missed as children. Knowing how they feel about their own parents can help a worker to reconstruct modestly the general patterns of a foster parent's early life and in so doing to understand better the person she has to work with today.

The time element in homefinding has always been a limiting factor. It calls for a quick "sizing up" of people. Case work in other areas usually arrives at an understanding of its clients over more-extended periods of time. In homefinding the case worker often feels handicapped by the short-time nature of the contact. Furthermore, she is here not in the position to give service while she grows to know and learns to understand her client, but instead has to postpone service until she and the foster parents are ready to have the child placed. Most

foster parents want and expect a child right away. Both office interviews and home visits can be used to interpret to applicants the length of time it takes to place a child as well as the impossibility of assuring just when a child may be available (no one knows when a child is going to be deserted, for example). These are among the many realities which all foster parents have to accept and which grow out of uncontrollable factors on the job.

The number of home visits and office interviews is discretionary and depends upon the particular needs of the case. In general there is no arbitrary division of material to be obtained from foster parents into facts which must be obtained in the first interview and those which are to be left for the home visit. The latter usually takes farther and deeper the case work process begun previously. It represents a desire on the part of the prospective foster parents to have their application studied and completed if possible. The application interview has at least interpreted the purpose and the nature of the agency's work. The home visit should validate, elucidate, and confirm the worker's good initial impression. Both steps require quick insight and experienced skill. After all, homefinding is a great deal more than a review of the physical properties of a prospective foster home. The evaluation of family relationships requires training in observation, a high degree of knowledge, and the acceptance of a responsibility which it would be either unreasonable or impossible to expect from a layman.

## *Testimony for Foster Parents*

*IN HOMEFINDING* the use of references has fluctuated from an overdependence on their value to an almost total disregard of them. There has been no standardization of practice with regard to the number of references<sup>1</sup> interviewed, whether they were "given" or "independent," and whether they should be visited or merely written to. Finally, opinions have differed as to whether relatives make profitable references, or are too biased for objective use.

One might wonder at first what we expect of references. It is an old custom to consult them in employment practice, and the use of them appears as a familiar part of contemporary everyday life, whether one simply wants to open a charge account or to select a surgeon for a serious operation. What one seeks from a personal reference is knowledge to confirm one's own confidence in the applicant. Presumably the reference may have first-hand information which has come to us only second-hand. In a small community where everyone knows everyone else there would be no need for references.

Probably in the whole field of social work no responsibility is greater than that of selecting a family for a foster child. In adoption, especially, the well-being and whole future life of the child are at stake, not to speak of

<sup>1</sup> The term "reference" in this chapter refers to a person as well as to information given by a person.



the satisfaction of the foster parents themselves. Home-finding, then, turned to the use of references as a way of sharing this responsibility with disinterested persons. It is significant that a large proportion of references do not add to the worker's knowledge of the foster family, but only confirm what she already has learned from her own observation and study. Awareness of this fact does not restrain the homefinder from using references. The fact is that she is looking for more than new information, namely, security and backing in a very responsible venture.

The earliest use of references by the agency was to ask the minister, the doctor, and the storekeeper to fill out and mail to the agency a specified form. Usually this was returned with a declaration to the effect that the family applying for a child was a reputable and responsible one. Sometimes instead of sending a formal blank a letter of reference was asked for. Usually the reference wrote a generalized, brief, and over-all statement of praise. Old records are filled with such letters, and examples are numerous:

Mrs. A. is a devoted member of my parish. She is President of our Ladies' Aid Society. Any child would be fortunate to be placed in her home.

The B's pay their bills promptly and are fine moral people. Anything you can do for them will be appreciated.

The G's are upright citizens of our community. They are in good health. I hope you will encourage them in their unselfish work.

Even these early types of reference reveal the psychology of being a reference. Everyone asked to serve in this capacity immediately feels an obligation to say favorable and complimentary things. This is partly inherent

in the tradition of what a reference is for and how a reference is supposed to behave. Partly it is a protection for the reference himself, a safeguard against the possibility of unpleasant involvement with the prospective foster family or the child-placing agency. The strong laudatory tone of references even today reflects the common feeling that anyone who offers his home to a child must be a person above reproach. It is the unusual reference who does not feel more closely identified with the family he is speaking for than he does with either the child or the agency. He may even feel the impulse to defend the family against any intrusion by the homefinder.

The early blanket use of written references gave way to a conviction that all references should be seen. It was conceded that people might tell the worker facts that they would not write. Also the belief arose that since references, too, are people, they need to be individualized. It was seen that they differ in value, some being of little help, others more profitable. It was common to ask the prospective foster parents for three references of their own choosing (not relatives), while in addition the agency took the responsibility for securing three others (independent references). "Independent" references were to counterbalance the acknowledged bias of "given" references. Back of this practice lay a lack of confidence in the worker's ability to know foster parents on her own account. The less sure the worker felt, the more testimony was required from references. Home-finding in the beginning dwelt more on physical and cultural proof of excellence than on emotional and psychological factors. References were needed to validate morals and behavior. A certain uniformity and sameness characterized the interviews with them and still does in

many instances today. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish one reference from the other, and one feels a "rubber-stamp" quality about their use. For example, in the following "given" reference:

Called at Mrs. A's. She was in the midst of washing and seemed in a hurry to get back to her work. She has known the B. family for five years and says they are lovely people. Mrs. B. takes good care of her own children and would do the same by our children. Mrs. A. says she isn't one to bother much with her neighbors but if anything happened to her she would trust Mrs. B. with her own child. She thinks she would be kind to a foster child and Mr. B. also. She doesn't know him very well but says he is a quiet man who minds his own business. Mrs. A. is sure we won't go wrong in giving them a child.

When several references had responded in much the same way, it made the worker feel upheld in the responsibility that she was taking. Usually she did not gain information not already known, but she did gain for herself insurance against possible error.

Sometimes the worker, despite her efforts, acquired from the interview information which related more to the reference than to the foster family. For example:

Mrs. C. asked me to come in and said she had expected me. She is a somewhat elderly woman who lives alone, having recently lost her husband. He was a wonderful man and they never had a day's trouble. She misses him terribly. Mrs. C. went into a long account of his illness and death. When I brought the subject around to the D's, Mrs. C. said they were "all right," good, moral people. Her husband used to talk politics with Mr. D., the latter was a Democrat, but not her husband. He used to say he didn't know what the country was coming to what with higher taxes and the national debt. The Government is "taking too much into its own hands and pretty soon a man won't be able to call his soul his own." Mr. C. had his own hardware shop but the New Deal, he said, would be the end of his business. Mrs. C. thinks it was this worry that had a large part to do with his death. I asked Mrs. C. if she knew Mrs. D. well. Yes, she's a good cook

and clean housekeeper. You could always tell when you went into her house that she was right on the job. Mrs. C. likes to get her work done early; thinks, then you have the rest of the day to yourself. There's no excuse for women to sit around and read fancy novels . . . . It seemed impossible to keep Mrs. C. on the subject of the D. family and I finally got up to leave. Mrs. C. said she wished I'd come back again and the D's are O.K. even if Mr. D. and her husband did not agree on politics.

As the worker has become more sure of herself, of what to look for in foster parents, of her skill in knowing people, and of her understanding of behavior, she has needed to put less stock in references. She now often feels that she knows the foster family better than the references do. In addition, she knows the family in relation to the kinds of responsibilities they will have to assume. Experienced foster mothers who already know what it "takes" may be the only references that can have a real opinion about another family's ability to "take it" also.

The current use of references cannot be separated from the development of case-work skills. In contemporary homefinding there are different points of view about the value and the place of references. Some agencies have given up the use of all references except the family physician. Some continue to see "given" references, although they have eliminated "independent" ones. Some deliberately ask for relatives as references, whereas others prefer not to use them. Some agencies have turned to the use of written statements only, while others combine the written communication with interviews. When an agency has given up the use of references altogether, it has done so believing that the workers' increased insight justifies it and that reference information is of little value by comparison. Perhaps,

also, less weight has been put on references as case workers have acknowledged that foster parents do not have to be perfect people, but the elimination of references is due even more to the development of professional skills and experience.

The use of relatives as references when given by foster parents suggests an interesting innovation in practice and suggests the growing confidence of the worker in her ability for insight and control. Sometimes a child is placed in a group of families, regardless of the fact that a single family unit assumes the major responsibility for his care. Especially is this true in adoptive situations, where the placement of the child, like the proverbial pebble, starts an ever-widening circle of circumstances. It is possible for relatives to give the worker material that helps her to gain a greater understanding of the foster parents. An interview with the mother of an applicant might, for example, clarify the relationship between mother and daughter. It might give the worker further insight into the daughter which would prove helpful in knowing how to use her. At the same time the case worker may feel little confidence in using relatives as references because they, by tradition, are considered less likely to be objective, and may be too protective. The case worker may also be afraid of becoming involved in a family situation. Certainly by the use of case-work skills, which include a professional attitude on the part of the worker, these obstacles may be overcome, just as they have been with "collaterals" in other areas of case work.

The value of professional references, such as doctors, ministers, priests, and teachers, is variable, depending on how well they know the applicants, how free they are

from prejudice, and how they are used by the agency. The old-type country doctor, who regularly brought all the children of a family into the world, who took care of little and big illnesses, and who saw death come to the household, was really a father and a friend, as well as a medical man. His medical knowledge was frequently enriched by intimate social contacts with the family which had a realistic homespun quality. The modern city doctor often cannot remember the family until given identifying information which enables him to look them up in his file. His experience may not justify an opinion about his patients except with regard to their physical condition. Not infrequently, however, a worker asks a doctor for information of a social character which he should not be expected to give. What the worker wants to secure from him, first of all, is knowledge which she is unable to gain by her own experience with the family, that is, the expert's opinion on health. Following is an interview with a doctor which combines medical and social information; the latter is of little value.

Dr. C. has known the T. family about twenty years. He said there was no "v.d." or "g.c." in the family, then asked if I knew what the initials stood for. There is no tuberculosis or any other infectious or contagious disease. He operated on Mrs. T. for fibroid tumor some nine years ago. She had difficulty following the birth of Ray and he treated her for a while, then performed a partial hysterectomy, leaving in the ovaries. He has treated Mrs. T. for minor illnesses since then — asthma — for which he gave vaccine injections. She has been all right since she got rid of a dog they had and about a year ago he treated her for shingles. He gave no other significant medical history. I asked directly about Mrs. T.'s tenseness and he smiled and said she was "dreamy-eyed" like her sister but did not go on with this. He volunteered that she could be affectionate with a child "in the right way, not mushy." He considers Mr. T. and Ray also physically all right.

He described the family as "good American." Mrs. T. is "clean inside and out," keeps a clean house. Mr. T.'s only vice is cigarette smoking. Mr. T. he described as "thin-lipped" but a nice chap, who likes children. He knows he likes Ray because he has seen him look at Ray in a way that indicates affection for him. He can tell when fathers like their sons. Mr. T. formerly had a bookkeeper's job with the X firm and earned \$85 a week. He lost this when the company went out of business in the depression. Dr. C. thinks Mr. T. took the change from an inside position to out-door very well. Mr. T. has always been helpful with the housework, particularly during Mrs. T.'s illness and still puts on an apron and helps her with the dishes. He described the family as harmonious, as being "one." They are careful about money matters and do not owe Dr. C. anything. They are extremely thrifty and can squeeze a dollar a long way.

Excluding medical information, what the worker gets here is largely the doctor's admiration for various things — an "American" family, cleanliness, how to show a child affection, money habits, and so forth. It is doubtful whether such general statements about the social life of the family help the worker, and one must question to what extent this represents real knowledge of the family rather than a desire to be a good reference. As home-finding has progressed to the point where the worker has gained insight and confidence in her own observations of family life, there is less need to depend on the doctor's reference for social data. Of course, health information about foster parents is essential in any sound child-placing program, whether obtained from the foster family's own physician or that of the agency. What homefinder has not had the experience of securing from the doctor knowledge of the disqualifying illness of a foster mother which is not known to the foster mother herself?

In the preceding example the worker acquires from the doctor subjective material which is too general. The

medical information tends to get lost in the social. In the following interview the medical knowledge stands out prominently and is of greater help because it is objectively given. Of course, all persons acting as references are influenced by their feeling of liking or disliking the family, but the interview below has an objectivity which strengthens the medical opinion. The doctor in this case has treated the own child in the family, a little boy who recently died of a rare disease. His mother and father are now applying to adopt a child.

Dr. O. said the W's lost their child a year ago of Tay-Sak's disease. It is an exceedingly rare illness and it is believed that in about 50% of the cases the disease has repeated itself in children born to the same couple. Therefore, the risk to the W's of having another child is very great. In his explanation of the disease, Dr. O. said that the fatty substances of the body are not properly absorbed and instead spill over into practically every part of the body, eventually becoming absorbed in the brain so that the child's sight is affected. The head becomes distorted. Dr. O. said Mrs. W. had difficulties during her pregnancy. The baby seemed to be normal for the first six months of his life then the disease began to make inroads and eventually his body remained like that of a seven or eight months old baby although he lived for two years. His head grew and his eyes were affected so he could not see nor did he develop normally in any other respect. The W's were devoted to him and spared no expense in their efforts to help the child although Mr. W. by no means is a rich man. I was able to get from Dr. O's discussion a much clearer picture of the ordeal which the W's have gone through. He spoke of Mr. and Mrs. W's very real parental feeling and their desire to help the child. Dr. O. said there was an added complication regarding Mrs. W. which made it questionable for her to undertake another pregnancy. She has a mild thyroid condition which will in no way effect her except that she should choose outdoor exercise of the less violent type. Dr. O. discussed with enthusiasm the charm and culture of the W's. He recommended them highly as adoptive parents.

The information about the W's received here not only comes from a professional source but also has greater



validity because two people are talking in an objective manner. The worker does not have to appease the reference and the reference accepts both the purpose and the person of the worker. The same quality of information can, of course, come from a nonprofessional person and when the material given is social in nature. A good deal depends upon the worker's approach to the reference. If she feels apologetic or suspicious, the reference will sense this. If she feels sure that she is doing a justified thing, is sincere, and identifies with the reference as well as with the child and the family, she will get more helpful material.

Usually the reference and the homefinder are strangers to each other. The former has to make up his mind quickly about the worker before he can feel free to discuss the family and determine what he will say. He needs to evaluate the worker as a person whom he can trust and as one without hostility for the family in question. He often becomes more free and spontaneous in his statements after he realizes that the worker already likes these people and that he, therefore, does not have to sell them to her. In addition, he usually needs help and leadership from the worker in discussing the family. It is characteristic of references that they are inclined to talk in general terms (they are lovely people, and so forth) until the worker, by means of interest, comments, and questions, leads them to a more specific picture. Furthermore, few references know much about an agency's work and the difficulties of placement. It seems unreasonable for us to ply them with questions such as "How would Mrs. E. deal with a child who wets the bed?" "Who doesn't do well in school?" and so forth. After all, who can answer these questions except the prospective foster mother herself, for who else knows how she feels about living with

such a child? The most profitable result we get from "character" and "social" references is some awareness of the status of the prospective foster family with regard to its popularity in the community and its general acceptability. Foster children are always publicized anyway, and to place them in families regarded as "queer" or too far "off center" adds unnecessary burdens. This is not to imply that certain families with individuality and color (for example, a foster mother who smokes and serves a cocktail, a foster father who cuts the grass on Sunday attired only in shorts) cannot be "nice" people and make excellent foster parents.

The question whether interviewing references is worth while is still undecided in the field. The trend seems to be toward less reliance on references as case workers become more confident in their own insight and interviewing skills. However, the development of such skills does not automatically call for a giving up of all references, but rather a more selective and sensitive use of them.

## *Refusing Foster Parents*

*IT IS* proverbial that case workers in homefinding feel a certain characteristic distaste for refusing prospective foster parents. This part of the work is universally described as unpalatable. It is true that the amount of responsibility taken by the case worker in refusing applicants who want to take children into their homes is great. It is also true that the nature of this responsibility "cuts across the grain" of her temperament and that it requires an understanding not only of the process itself but also of her own resistance to it.

The act of refusing foster parents usually creates certain fears for both worker and foster parent. Who likes to refuse and who enjoys being refused? Every foster parent who applies for a child knows consciously or unconsciously that she runs the risk of being denied. It is a potentially vulnerable and unflattering position to put oneself in. The dangers encountered are deeply personal. Even a refusal that springs from a clear-cut practical issue, such as distance from the agency or lack of adequate sleeping accommodations, is frequently invested by the foster parent with a more personal significance than the situation would justify. If the reason for being refused is more clearly personal, age or widowhood, for example, the devaluation she feels is greater. If, as often happens, she is left with a vague, uncertain idea as to why she is refused, she experiences feelings of frustration and

hostility. The refusal which is obscure leaves the applicant a prey to doubts about herself. Here is a situation in which her phantasies concerning herself, real, or unreal, are assumed without proof. Her "bad conscience" may now be confirmed.

It is not commonly recognized that the worker's reluctance to refuse foster parents springs from certain inherent factors in her own feeling. These are both natural and unnatural, acknowledged and unacknowledged. It is natural not to relish refusing a person who wishes to give you something. It is harder to refuse something you need. It is still more difficult to say no to a person with whose sympathies and interests you identify. The hardest refusal for the worker is that in which unknown and unacknowledged factors in her own psychology play a part. Ideas about foster parents, what they should be like, the various criteria according to which they are estimated come not from outlines, but from cultural concepts and to a larger degree from her ideals, admirations, and disappointments concerning her own parents. Every homefinder is in the psychological position of choosing not only foster parents but also her own parents. Psychiatric insight reveals more and more that the case worker in homefinding is influenced by her early feelings about her own parents and that these in turn color her selection of foster parents. Depending on these attitudes and feelings and on her awareness and acknowledgment of them, certain criteria will emerge. The worker's natural tendency may be to select "corrected" parents, or foster parents who represent an improvement on the character and qualities of her own parents or, on the other hand, she may need to select parents whose characteristics disparage those of her own parents. The

danger lies in exaggerating these tendencies or when the degree of perfection demanded is too rigid or unreal. For example, a worker may unconsciously set up such high standards of selection that they can never be fulfilled. In this area of case work there are opportunities for unconsciously continuing grudges and resentments felt against one's own parents. It would be unrealistic to suggest that only workers whose own family relationships have been abundantly satisfying undertake this job. More to the point is the necessity for the worker to see and to acknowledge how the colorings and biases of her own situation can enter into her selection and use of foster parents.

Related to the worker who is bound by the force of early parental relationships is the worker who finds it impossible or too costly emotionally to refuse foster parents at all. She cannot do this, for refusing prospective foster parents would be equivalent to refusing her own parents. Maturity, which should bring with it the ability to be critical of and at the same time a capacity for liking and accepting one's parents as they really are, is not yet full-fledged. This same personal attitude of the worker can also be expressed by unreasonable criticism, veiled in a protecting vagueness or shown by the inability to set up any criteria at all. Certainly every professional person needs to become aware of how his own motivations may affect his work.

The selection of foster homes has at best been based on the assumption that although there is no such thing as a perfect home there is such a thing as a normal family. Experience has taught us that certain general factors in foster homes do not lend themselves favorably to placement. The foster parent who has no motive other than

money, who is entirely dependent financially on the amount of board paid by the agency, is more often than not temperamentally undesirable or under too much financial strain to help a foster child. The foster parent who wishes to use a foster child as "treatment" for his own child or as a remedy for a bad marital relationship cannot offer a home atmosphere and an emotional environment conducive to the best interests of a foster child. The foster parent who must dominate the situation to the exclusion of the agency and of the worker has little use in a practical situation, where mutual responsibility in the job and sharing of the child are essential. Within broad generalizations there are innumerable individual combinations of personal and practical considerations which rule out the use of certain foster homes. These may run all the way from clear-cut obvious factors (old age, a water supply which fails to pass the local Board of Health ruling, an already large family) to less easily defined matters, such as immature character, neurotic personality, and basically belligerent attitudes. In other words, not every application of a would-be foster parent can be accepted. Inherent, therefore, in the job of homefinding is the responsibility for selection and the consequent necessity of a certain number of "refusals."

The manner and method of refusing ineligible foster parents is of great importance. On this will depend to a large degree the acceptance and the popularity of the program in the community, not to speak of the individual feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of many would-be foster parents who live in this community. As in all other areas of case work, the responsibility of the worker here is to help, not to destroy.

Of the various methods of refusing foster parents, the most popular has been a general statement, usually to the effect that "we do not have any child that would fit into your home right now." The trouble with this kind of refusal is that it does not always help a foster parent, and it guarantees nothing—in other words, the foster parent does not always stay refused. She comes back next week or next month to experience further frustration. This does not mean there is no place for this type of refusal in special situations, but that as a wholesale method it does not achieve its purpose; for, after all, the test of a refusal is that the person stay refused. Furthermore, this form of refusal, though meant to be benevolent, is often insincere. This is especially true when it actually covers up an inner and uncomplimentary cause not shared with the applicant.

The general philosophy in refusing foster parents has been to do so, when necessary, in as kindly and as little damaging a way as possible. Forms of would-be benevolent evasion are not always kindly and sometimes they can be damaging. This part of the homefinding job, for reasons already stated, is likely to be given little thought and to be considered less important. Do we rationalize this by saying that since we have decided not to use these people we won't spend much time on them? Here is a situation in which it is economical to wind up our affairs quickly; besides, these would-be foster parents are not clients, are not seeking our help with personal problems from which the reasons for refusal arise. Is it therefore better to leave unsaid what does not have to be said?

Methods of refusing foster parents are determined by factors in each situation as well as by the general objective of homefinding. The all-over purpose of the case

worker at this point is not therapy per se, but evaluation. She does not select parents for treatment, but for use. This is not to imply that refusing a person must not or cannot be therapeutic in itself, but that unless the case worker can accept her function as that of evaluation she cannot be a homefinder. There is no economy in evading this responsibility of evaluation, for otherwise there is no selective process, no choice—only frustration and the irrational acceptance of unprofitable foster parents. A requisite for fulfilling the function of evaluation is the necessity for the worker to feel that she has a right to choose. If she feels apologetic or guilty she will have trouble in refusing foster parents in a helpful manner. The feeling of having “a right” comes to her from two sources: first, her own sincere desire to help children and, second, her identification with the work, purposes, and function of her agency, which after all is set up to benefit children through the use of normally endowed foster homes.

As in all other areas of case work, there is no refuge in wholesale ways of refusing. The one general truth involved is that homefinders are dealing with human beings, not shopworn articles or imperfect commodities. This is a person-to-person relationship involving consideration, tact, and dignity.

Some prospective foster parents are easy to refuse because the reason for the refusal is reasonable, objective, and obvious to both foster parents and worker. The foster mother whose home is at too great a distance to be visited by the child's parents may feel disappointed, but she does not as a rule feel personal discrimination against her. The foster mother who lives in a highly congested neighborhood may accept refusal without neces-



sarily feeling a loss of self-esteem. The reason for refusal is the true and primary reason, and of such a character that little hurt beyond ordinary loss of expectation is felt.

Another type of refusal is that where the foster mother refuses herself, that is, she chooses to withdraw her request because from the worker she gets a clearer understanding of what is involved in becoming a foster parent. Every prospective foster mother comes to the agency with a preconceived idea of what the job is like. She is more likely to be aware of the child and what she hopes he will be and do for her, at this time, than she is of the agency or the difficulties of the job itself. She wants a child, not an agency; yet this she must eventually accept. The worker's skill in interpreting just what it means to become a foster mother and what it takes, helps a foster mother to check the reality against her expectations. Because of this experience she may decide she does not wish to become a foster parent. An example of such a case follows.

Mrs. Matthews comes to the office by appointment. She is a rather worn-looking woman about 55. She has a kindly expression and a serious manner. She at first seemed a little ill at ease but lost this as she continued talking. She said she would like to board two school-age children. She had heard about our agency through a friend who used to board children from us a long time ago. She would like two "nice children" either girls or boys or both. I asked Mrs. M. how she happened to think of taking children. Well, she has been feeling lonely since her two children married last year. She has a son, Ben, twenty-six, and a girl, Mabel, twenty-four. Ben married a childhood chum and Mabel a lieutenant in the army. I felt from her discussion of the children that Mrs. M. approved of the marriages though she regretted losing her children. She is a little worried about Mabel, as she follows her husband around from one assignment to another and he probably will be sent overseas before long. If this

happens, Mrs. M. wants Mabel to come back to her. It wouldn't make any difference about her taking children, either. Mabel likes children and Mrs. M. has an extra unused room.

Mrs. M. said she wanted children who would "grow up with her," whom she could love and "do for." She would like to sew for a girl and help a boy with his school work. She did those things for her own children and if "she does say so herself, they are lovely children." I acknowledged the satisfaction she must feel in her children and then asked about her husband and his feeling about boarding children. Her outgoing manner changed here and she looked thoughtful and a little sad. She hasn't talked with him about her plans yet. He is "a nice, quiet man" who never helped her very much with her own children. She apologized for him, saying he has always been so busy with his work he hasn't had much time for that kind of thing. He is a plumber and often works late hours, even Sundays, sometimes. I asked her if she was planning to talk with Mr. M. and she said she was but thought she would come and see us first and then she could explain better to him. I had the impression that Mrs. M. questioned whether he would be in sympathy with her initiative.

I asked Mrs. M. if she would like to know some of the experiences common to foster mothers, as some of those things she might like and others she might not. She here leaned forward with interest. I told her in a simple factual way some of the familiar kinds of situations our children have experienced and stressed the fact that the parents of our children do keep in touch with them and in most situations visit in the boarding home. Mrs. M. looked worried at this and asked if the parents drank or misbehaved. I said sometimes this was true and sometimes not and explained to her how we work with the parents about visiting, etc. She said "I don't know whether I'd like that." Do the children go back to their parents? I said many times they did. It all depended on the situation. I could see Mrs. M. was visualizing that the children wouldn't belong to her. I said one of the hard things about being a foster mother is that you sometimes have to give up the children. She agreed and said she didn't know about that. After you had done everything for them then maybe you'd have to give them up. She didn't think that would be easy and I agreed it was hard. I further talked with Mrs. M. about the fact that we would want to see her husband and talk with him, too, about the whole plan. She looked surprised and disappointed at this and said, "He wouldn't want anyone to come to see him."

At this point I told Mrs. M. we felt it was important for her to know some of the complications in boarding children because only then could she really know whether she wanted to go on with her application or not. She looked thoughtful at this and said now that she knew maybe she had better withdraw her application. Maybe she should adopt a child but she knows she is "too old" now — she wouldn't want parents interfering, besides her husband wouldn't like to be bothered with anyone coming to see him. This brought out more critical feeling about her husband and it was my impression that the recent marriages of her children had left her alone with her husband and her disappointment in him for whatever cause. I told Mrs. M. I knew she felt disappointed and that I understood this. She smiled and said I had been kind to her. She knew she just wouldn't want parents visiting in her home and she was glad I had explained this to her. She thanked me and said "goodbye."

It is self-evident that this foster mother withdrew of her own accord. The worker enabled her to do this without "losing face" and without going into her disappointment in her husband, a difficulty for which Mrs. M. is not asking help. What Mrs. M. didn't know when she came was that getting children from this agency means getting parents too, and this she does not want.

The decision to withdraw her application may be the foster mother's own idea, or the worker may lead her to withdraw. Using the interpretation of the job as a face-saving device is valid in situations in which there would be no advantage to the applicant in confronting her with the true reason for the worker's decision (when the applicant is too limited, intellectually or emotionally, for example). In such instances the worker wishes to preserve and sustain the integrity of the individual, and she selects as the reason for refusal one that the applicant also can accept without violating her own self-esteem. In the M. situation the reason selected was that the job of being a foster parent is different from what Mrs. M.

expected. In many cases it is important that the applicants keep their ideas and ideals about themselves. To disillusion them, inasmuch as they are not seeking the worker's help in this respect, would be a destructive experience for them.

Not every prospective foster parent whose application is considered unprofitable withdraws of her own accord or is led to withdraw by the worker after she begins to see the realities involved. To some the difficulties presented only act to whet the appetite and to fortify an already strong determination to get a foster child. Such cases occur, regardless of the worker's skill and ability in refusing the applicant. For the applicant the only satisfactory conclusion to the dilemma would be for the case worker to give her a desired child and this, of course, the worker cannot do. In such deadlocks the worker has to accept the fact that she can neither make the applicant happy nor bring negotiations to a positive conclusion. She has to face with the applicant directly the hard fact that the agency cannot use her home. Most people are neither helped nor mollified by evasions, but "set on edge." Sometimes a definite refusal, though unpleasant, is more kind and more comforting than evasion. There are specific situations in which hostile applicants are at least outwardly appeased because the worker makes clear that it would be impossible for them to work together, this having been demonstrated by their current interview. Some foster parents press the worker for the unflattering personal reason for refusal, and thus they create a situation in which there can be no real refusal on any other terms. How much a worker can reveal the nature of an applicant's disqualifications directly (for example, unsatisfactory marital relationship, immatur-

ity, rigid attitudes) is an individual matter growing out of a quick and sensitive diagnosis in each case. If the applicant seems a sick and disturbed person or if her defenses are strong, complete frankness might be damaging and beyond the worker's scope. In other cases, when the applicant is more healthy, the situation can be handled with more forthrightness if the tone used is accrediting and constructive. On the positive way in which the worker handles this will depend whether the applicant leaves the agency a lifelong enemy or a more sober individual, disappointed, of course, but with a feeling that she is liked anyway and with some sincere understanding as to why her application is unacceptable. What the worker does here is to refuse the request, not the person as a human being. In her manner and tone she identifies with and is understanding of the applicant's limitations without being condemnatory or superior. This is easy to say and hard to do if the applicant is aggressive and hostile, but the capacity for empathy, necessary in all settings of case work, obtains here and is of crucial importance. It is not beyond experience for this attitude on the part of the worker to bring about a desire for help in the applicant, with a consequent taking of responsibility for referral to an appropriate source. In the following case the applicant is referred to a psychiatrist.

Mr. and Mrs. A. at office. During the course of the interview Mr. A. gave me his age as 38 and Mrs. A. as 35. There is something in their appearance and manner which gives the impression of middle agedness. One gets the feeling that they are rather completely set people. I got the impression that apart from their feelings about their inability to have their own baby, they were pretty satisfied with their relationship together and in what life had given them.

Mr. A. is a tall man, somewhat inclined to be stout. He has a

pleasant round face. Mrs. A. is a woman of average height and stature with dark hair and eyes. She was quite well dressed, in rather chic clothes, and altogether I got a rather matronly impression of her.

Mr. and Mrs. A. used this interview for the most part to tell me of their urgent desire to adopt a child and to use some pressure on me to give immediate consideration to their application. In what I thought was quite an unconscious way they shut off discussion around the kind of questions which I raised. I did get a very strong feeling of rigidity. They told me that they had been married for six years and that during the course of these six years there had been three pregnancies. Mrs. A. said with a great deal of feeling, with her face flushing and tears coming to her eyes that she had lost her last baby in December. The delivery had been a normal one and the baby full time but it had been still born and weighed only 4 pounds and eight ounces. Sometime before this there had been another still born baby. Three years before this she lost still another child, who died a few hours after birth. Mrs. A. had become acutely sick with anemia. They go once a week to visit the graves of these babies, which they now want to replace "with one live baby girl." Mrs. A. elaborated upon this as if this was a very normal procedure. She told me that she had erected a head stone for them. They frequently visit the cemetery in order to see that the graves are well kept.

Mrs. A. told me that her father, who was 80, died a short while ago. He used to live with them in their large eight room house. Her mother died six months ago. She and Mr. A. after their marriage had lived with her parents. This had been the only condition on which she had been willing to marry Mr. A. Her mother for a number of years had been a very sick woman. It had been Mrs. A's major responsibility to care for her mother. Mrs. A. told about her desire to have a baby girl, saying that she would like to have with her own daughter the kind of beautiful relationship she had been able to have with her mother. Her mother had many times told her of the extra meaning of having a girl baby over a boy baby. Mrs. A. in a very pleased way told me how much her closeness to her mother had meant to her mother and that her mother's dying words had indicated her gratitude for Mrs. A's devotion to her. In a casual way Mr. A. mentioned that he had known Mrs. A. for eight years before they were married. He had proposed, he did not know how many times, before Mrs. A. had been willing to accept his proposal. She had finally "put

the cards right on the table" in telling him that she would feel even in marrying him that her primary responsibility would be towards her mother. He said that she had expected, he supposed, that that would discourage him. Instead it had only increased his feeling of admiration for her and he had kept after her until she had agreed to marry him. He talked very tenderly of his deceased mother-in-law, indicating that their relationship together as a family unit had been in his mind an ideal one. He talked in a very touching way about Mrs. A's extreme kind of attachment to her mother. He made it clear to me that to him this had been an entirely positive kind of thing which to some extent he had shared with his wife.

In response to my encouragement to tell me what it was that they wanted in a baby, they elaborated on the fact that they wanted a girl and Mrs. A. wanted a baby somewhere between two and four months, or as young as possible. Besides this they had the requirement that the parents should be known. I indicated to them quite clearly that while it was true that we sometimes did have a baby who met all of these requirements, actually most of our babies did not fit into these standards. I made it clear to them that they would be limiting themselves in their application to this agency for a child if they were thinking in terms of sticking rigidly to these requirements. I found that they were willing to consider a somewhat older child. Mr. A. showed the most flexibility. He thought that it would be perfectly all right to take a baby up to two years of age. Although Mrs. A. was giving lip service to his thinking, actually she was unwilling to think of a child of this age. Mr. A. also showed some wavering around their requirement that the baby be a girl. He pointed out to Mrs. A. very tenderly that after all if they had been able to have a baby of their own, they would not have been able to have assurance that the baby would be a girl. However, Mrs. A. did not respond to this. Above all else, she wanted a baby girl. They brought great pressure on me to supply them with a baby such as they were describing. They did not seem to feel that they were being rigid, although I had made clear several times they were limiting themselves. The only thing that they did not seem to have detailed requirements around was the actual appearance of the baby, although Mrs. A. here did express some preference for a baby who would be dark like they are.

Mr. and Mrs. A. described to me the home in which they lived, indicating that it was an extremely "homey" kind of place

where all of Mr. and Mrs. A's family come quite freely. To a large extent their interests outside of their home seem to be tied up with the church in their community. This was something which they both seem to share alike.

I learned that Mr. A. is working as assistant manager of a ladies' hosiery firm. Mrs. A. before her marriage worked for a small advertising company which later dissolved. Mrs. A. also told me about her activities with a small club group. Mr. A. spent some time in telling me of his past activities as a settlement leader.

Around the question of Mrs. A's physical condition, I learned that these pregnancies have been pretty crucial times for her. After her first pregnancy, when she developed anemia, the doctor warned her that to attempt another pregnancy would be clear suicide. She did not accept this and went through two more pregnancies. After the loss of her third baby, it was necessary for her to remain in bed for many months. She told me with tears in her eyes that if we were to tell her that we could not give her a baby now she would somehow succeed in becoming pregnant again.

I was extremely uncertain about this situation. Mrs. A. gave me the impression of a really sick woman and for this reason I felt an outright refusal might be harmful to her. I did not know what being denied might do to her or to what lengths it might drive her. I attempted, therefore, to leave as wide open as possible the question of our having a baby for them. Mr. and Mrs. A. indicated very strongly and aggressively their feeling that they were of course good adoptive parents and if we would hurry the whole process of study we would of course use their home. They attempted to bring pressure on me to commit myself to an early appointment for a home visit, which I could not promise to do.

Later—I received a long letter from Mr. A. In this letter he indicated his own feeling that Mrs. A. was very depressed. He described her as being upset. He was writing to me in confidence. He indicated his feeling that Mrs. A. was "likely to suffer a breakdown." He indicated his feeling that getting a baby would be very important to her.

After consultation with the agency psychiatrist the worker talked with Mr. A. about his wife. Through the



help of the psychiatrist and of Mr. A., Mrs. A. was eventually enabled to go for psychiatric consultation.

This is one of those difficult times when to be outspoken as to the real reason for refusing would be to do untold damage. The worker is sensitive to the situation and purposely postpones refusal. She is not tempted to go into areas that are outside her knowledge and ability; at the same time she does take the only responsibility valid for her, that of referral. Her skill is shown by the fact that she understands this and is able to bring it about. In addition and of equal importance, the worker does not give in to what might be called a "natural impulse" to be irritated by the smugness and rigidity of these people.

It is sometimes more difficult for a worker to refuse in a helpful manner a person she does not like. Mrs. H., a middle-aged nurse, recently applied for "six babies to board." She wanted to go into this as a business. She was aggressive and demanding. She had references from several doctors commending her and saying she "knew all about babies." The young worker resented Mrs. H's officiousness and unconsciously revealed this in her manner. The worker's statement that the agency did not believe in placing so many babies in a family, an explanation of their individual needs, the small rate of board—all fell on deaf ears. Mrs. H. became annoyed and provocatively asked the worker if she was married and if she had children of her own. To this the worker replied that she was not but that she did have a great deal of experience in caring for the agency's children. Mrs. H. then wanted to know if the worker was refusing to give her children. When the answer was in the affirm-

ative, she left the office, saying she would see the head of the agency about this. In this case the worker's annoyance is understandable. Certainly it would have been futile to encourage this unloving woman, but the worker's natural irritation gets in her own way, puts her on the defensive, and increases Mrs. H.'s pique. A more skillful refusal would have resulted if the worker had kept her control and dignity while being just as firm in her refusal. Had she been able to listen to Mrs. H.'s irritating demands more objectively, had she shown some interest in her ideas and accredited her with a right to these ideas, even if she (the worker) could not agree with them, and had she been sorry throughout that the agency was unable to meet the applicant's wishes, a more skillful refusal would have resulted. Mrs. H., of course, would have remained as difficult as before, but on the other hand she would not have become so upset. Instead of defending or apologizing for her unmarried state, the worker might have allowed Mrs. H. to keep her needed feeling of superiority by acknowledging that this was the worker's misfortune. In this situation, in contrast to the case of Mr. and Mrs. A., the worker's annoyance and dislike increased the hostility and made the refusal destructive.

Applications that lead to a dramatic issue because of the neurotic need of the applicant are not great in number. More usual are prospective foster parents who just do not quite measure up to requirements, not because they are ill, but because of personal limitations about which it would be uncomfortable for the worker to talk but not necessarily damaging to the applicant, to know. These are the refusals which are frequently only vague postponements, thus leaving the applicant

with some feeling of hope (perhaps she was even given an application blank). The worker inwardly feels unsatisfied and a little guilty. In these situations it would seem that case workers could often be more direct; that according to the individual case, reasons for refusal can be selected which, though they bring real disappointment, do not destroy the applicant's self-esteem and do give him a fair understanding of the refusal. What is selected to tell has importance, but the worker's manner of telling is of greater importance, and mysterious forms of tapering off the refusal are unprofitable.

Sometimes refusing an applicant throws discredit on some other member of the family, not on the foster mother herself. Mrs. G. applies to a children's agency, saying she would like to take a brother and a sister of school age to board. Her own children, Mary (eighteen) and Jimmie (sixteen), are in high school. The office interview reveals a warm, understanding woman who misses caring for younger children and, by taking foster children, wishes to repeat the kind of mothering she gave her own children when they were young. She speaks easily and naturally of her husband, a bank clerk earning \$50 a week. The worker's impression of Mrs. G. is a positive one. She shows interest in the agency's work and responds realistically to the idea of sharing the job with the worker. In the office interview with Mr. G. the worker gets the impression of a likeable but very immature man, who resents his children, their growing independence, and his inability to make them do what he wants them to do. He is nervous, very sensitive, and rigid in his ideas. He suffers from stomach ulcers. He shows no normal interest in withholding his anxieties from the worker and talks at length in a childish, revealing way.

The worker feels that Mr. G. would have great difficulty in accepting foster children, especially their parents. In addition, she feels that his highstrung sensitivity and moral prejudices would be hard for foster children to live with. Without studying the case further, she questions whether to take up the refusal with Mr. or Mrs. G., deciding in the latter's favor, since she feels that Mrs. G. is more mature and that Mr. G. would find it too upsetting. Furthermore, she felt that Mrs. G. might better handle the situation with her husband directly.

The following are excerpts from the workers' interview with Mrs. G.:

Mrs. G. in the office about fifteen minutes late. She apologized for this, saying that just as she was starting from the house the gas man came and she had to wait to talk with him. As before, she was becomingly dressed and looked very pretty. She seemed relaxed and at ease in manner. She made a few casual comments about the weather. Worker said that she hoped it had not inconvenienced Mrs. G. to come in to the office, but that there were a number of things she wanted to talk over with her personally, and in the home there might have been interruptions. Mrs. G. said that she didn't mind at all coming in — it was perfectly all right, but she had wondered just what it was about. Worker said that she realized Mrs. G. would be quite disappointed and that she was sorry for Mrs. G.'s sake that the decision had to be made, but that she had felt quite definitely, after talking with Mrs. G.'s husband that it would not be best for them to take on the responsibility for a foster child. Mrs. G. said quite simply that she didn't understand, asking if there was something about which worker had disapproved. Worker explained that it was not a matter of disapproval, that she had enjoyed talking with Mr. G., and felt him to be a likeable person, but the kind of man who is very sensitive, who feels deeply about things, and particularly about his own children. He has tried to do everything he possibly could for them and his relationship with them has been very important to him. Mrs. G. said she realized this, "he's more interested in the children than most fathers are. I have lots of friends whose husbands are interested in their children in a way,

but really just don't pay any attention to them." Her brother-in-law (sister's husband) has a boy in high school who is not doing very well, but the father just says that he'll graduate by the time he is go and there is nothing to worry about. Mrs. G. had thought from this that her husband would also be very much interested in foster children. Worker said that this would undoubtedly be true. She wondered whether Mr. G. had talked with his wife much about the plan after his interview with worker. Mrs. G. said that he had not said anything in particular about the interview, but she has wondered just what impression he had made because from the few things he did say she thought maybe he had been kittenish and had bored worker with his talk. Worker replied that she had not had that type of an impression at all, that Mr. G. had talked about himself and his interest in children in a very genuine way. She asked whether Mr. G. did behave in a kittenish way sometimes. Mrs. G. smiled and said "Yes, you just can't tell how he is going to be. Sometimes when he should be serious he gets to being funny — then, other times, when other people are gay he is very serious, but I know that as far as children are concerned he would be very kind to them and would do everything he could for them. You wouldn't have to worry about his being good to them."

Worker agreed and said again that we felt that because Mr. G. feels the way he does about his own children it would be extremely important for him to feel that he was succeeding with the foster child, and that we could not guarantee that this would be so. If it did not work out it would be a tremendous disappointment to him and he is the sort of person who feels things deeply and a disappointment of this kind would be very important to him. Mrs. G. said that she realized her husband has been deeply concerned about the children, especially about Jimmie. The thing that seems to worry him most is that Jimmie can't seem to make up his mind about what he wants to do. She referred to the various interests that Jimmie had had from time to time and said that just within the past few days his dramatic teacher at high school has talked with him about the possibility of getting a scholarship to a dramatic school and this may be a good solution for him. Worker inquired what Mr. G. would think about this plan. Mrs. G. said that she felt sure her husband would think it was fine, adding "just so long as he had *something*."

She thought it was just that her husband was afraid that later on Jimmie might feel his father should have made him get

ahead. Worker asked if perhaps Mr. G. wished that someone had made him prepare himself for a vocation. Mrs. G. replied "Maybe so, he's always been interested in making good. While he has been on this job he was going to a night school for a while. Then he started in at the University, taking courses at night. It was very strenuous for him and he had to study all the time. He almost worked himself up to a nervous breakdown, but I finally persuaded him to give it up." Worker commented that she imagined there were a lot of situations in which Mrs. G. had to help her husband take it easy. Mrs. G. replied, "Yes, there are. He *is* excitable and he is under so much pressure all the time in his work that he does get nervous and tired. I try to get him to slow down. Some of my friends think I am too easy, but I feel that somebody has to be calm." Worker commented that she thought Mrs. G. must be a tremendous help to her husband and that she is just the right sort of person for him, that she has done a good job with her husband and with the children, and that it must mean a lot to her to realize how much she means to the family. Mrs. G. said that she had felt it to be a big responsibility and that from the beginning she felt no matter what else she did it was her business to help the children and her husband to have a happy home.

Mrs. G. said she thinks Mr. G. does need the sort of help she can give. Whenever he gets nervous or upset it affects his stomach. He has serious trouble with stomach ulcers; he was under strict treatment for quite a period of time and now whenever he has signs of nervous indigestion he immediately goes back on a rigid diet. He hasn't had any really serious trouble lately and it's partly because he is so careful about his diet whenever he feels the slightest disturbance. Mrs. G. laughed easily as she said "You see, that's one of the reasons why it is important for me to keep him from getting upset, because when he gets that way I am the one that has to prepare all the cream soups and the other things that he has to have. The doctor says that he would be all right if he were an outdoor laborer, but the trouble is that he uses his mind too much and he always is under pressure — you know how it is with bank clerks, there is never any let-up to it." Worker said that she realized that Mr. G's work must be quite a strain. She added that along with other things that is another reason why we feel we want to avoid adding any more pressure to his life, that being as sensitive as he is, the additional responsibilities and worry about a foster child might be the thing that would be just

too much, and we feel we have to safeguard the interest of the family, since we realize all that it means when a foster child is placed in the home. Mrs. G. said that she could understand now why we felt the way we did and that it was perfectly all right as far as she was concerned. She added, "Somehow I had a feeling that it wouldn't go through." Worker wondered if she had any idea why she had felt this way and Mrs. G. replied, "No, I just felt that I shouldn't make any plans or do anything about changing the furniture or any of those things until we really knew what was going to happen."

Worker asked if Mrs. G. had any particular ideas about how she would explain to her husband that we were not going to have children for them. Mrs. G. said, thoughtfully, "I don't know." Worker suggested that perhaps Mrs. G. could talk with him further about the kinds of problems that our children have and the amount of change it would mean in their own lives. Mrs. G. said hesitantly, "Maybe that would be a good idea, but I can't decide just now. I'll just have to think it over — I'll think of something on the way home." She said that she had appreciated Worker's talking with her so fully about it, and giving her so much time. Worker expressed appreciation for the fact that Mrs. G. had been willing to come in to the office and said that she had enjoyed becoming acquainted with her and hoped things continued to work out well for all the family. As Mrs. G. left, she commented in a friendly and genuine manner, "The more I see of the way you do things, the more interesting I think it is."

In the G. case the worker takes responsibility for being selectively frank, whereas in the A. situation she assumes responsibility for referral. The worker's estimate of Mrs. G. is that of a mature woman who can be counted on to accept and to understand the reason why it is not possible to use her home. The worker does not evade the issue, but faces the situation with Mrs. G. and supports her in it. Furthermore, the worker does not raise doubts in Mrs. G's mind about her marriage or the general worthwhileness of Mr. G. as a parent. She does not tell her facts about her husband which she does not already know. She appreciates the real dis-

appointment Mrs. G. must feel and gives her assurance of her own liking and acceptance. Finally, she respects her for her decision to tell her husband of the refusal in her own way. In both the A. and the G. cases the worker quickly "sizes up" the situation, and her choice and method of refusal in each case grow out of individual diagnostic considerations. She selects the facts to be told to each applicant and is discriminating in her manner of stating them.

The necessity of refusing the applications of certain would-be foster parents is naturally an inherent part of the homefinding job. To refuse with discrimination, tact, and acceptance requires no small ability. It takes more than an amateur's insight. It is an opportunity to convert a heretofore disagreeable chore into a case-work challenge of no mean proportions.



## *Homefinding in Wartime*

*THE YEAR* 1942 and the advent of war bring new difficulties to homefinding, in addition to the problems usually involved in getting, selecting, and using foster homes. This gigantic social upheaval threatens to abolish in a moment standards we have built up over a long period of years. Since there is a growing shortage of foster homes and at the same time a swelling demand by parents in defense areas for placement of their children, what shall be our policy? Shall we lower our basic qualifications for new foster homes in order to speed up the placement process? Shall we overwork the previously accepted homes? Shall we dilute the process of supervision and leave the foster parent "holding the bag"? Shall we leave the foster child to his own devices? Is it true that we have really reached the "saturation point" of foster-home applications? These are some of the questions confronting child-placing agencies today.

As a result of the war, abrupt changes are taking place in all families. Fathers and foster fathers are leaving home for military service. Mothers with reduced incomes are seeking work. Many children are being left without proper care. These are real war-made problems. In addition, husbands and wives are using the war situation as an opportunity to carry out old wishes with regard to problems of long standing. Certain parents who have "hung together" for reasons of convention now

have a self-justification for placing their children in foster homes. Mothers who have heretofore only "played with" the idea of working are now able to take jobs with equanimity and a clear conscience. The growing demand for women in war industries puts a premium on separation of mothers from their children. Furthermore, the opportunity easily to make higher wages in defense factories is irresistible to many parents. The economic opportunities of war bring a strong urge to make quick money, not unlike the characteristics of a "gold rush." This situation is even more urgent because it comes after a depriving depression. Furthermore, good women who in ordinary times might well be interested in boarding children now submerge this interest, at least temporarily, in order to rent rooms to defense workers who can pay more than can the agencies. Foster parents likewise have the timely opportunity to "get rich quick." Child-placing agencies are thus faced with fewer resources in terms of foster homes and at the same time a correspondingly greater need for them.

One of the dilemmas of defense is whether it is better to send children into foster homes and let their mothers produce arms for the nation or to try to keep children at home, thereby limiting industrial "man-power." The trend in defense areas points to more general employment of women and consequently a greater number of children dislocated from family life. The British experience with evacuation showed that it was not primarily the bombings which created neurotic disturbances in children, but the less dramatic although more upsetting disruption of daily routine, the breaking of family relationships, the readjustments growing out of this, and the additional suffering caused by too-little

preparation for change. It is of the utmost importance in time of war to hold fast to the now tried conviction that children, especially preschool children, should be kept with their mothers and that when mothers must work daytime care involving less complete separation of mothers and children should be developed, such as foster-day-care, the day nursery, housekeeper service, and after-school-programs.

War, of course, does not eliminate the need for child-placing agencies, with their facilities for longer-time boarding and adoption. It does not do away with death, illegitimacy, separation of parents, or neurotic personality. Mothers who reject their children still reject them in wartime, but in addition they now have an acceptable reason for leaving them. These mothers are incapable of recognizing the truth of the fact that staying at home with their children is good defense procedure.

The need for boarding homes has always been greater than the supply. Now, with the shrinkage in the customary number of applications comes the query whether we can let go usual standards of homefinding and in so doing fill the quotas with homes slightly below par. The answer to this would seem to lie in the meaning of "standards." Certain usual qualifications, involving external and outward physical factors, or where the family make-up is not considered strictly conventional, might be foregone if other more basic qualifications are there. A little dust and dirt never brought unhappiness to a child as long as he felt welcome and wanted. Correct English or a "parlor suite" have little to do with character. Many worthwhile persons have shared a bed with a brother or sister or a foster brother or a foster sister. Illustrious citizens have grown up in the home of an

aunt, a grandmother, a widow, or even an unmarried woman (if she is a mature person). Many children in their own homes are now temporarily deprived of their fathers. These are the kinds of "deficiencies" that can be accepted without too great damage. They are in contrast to limitations of character, of loving and reasonably comfortable family relationships, without which foster homes are only foster houses. It is, furthermore, not inconceivable to accept applications of foster parents whose financial motivation is strong. If the other essentials are there, wherein lies the danger? The person whose motive is financial is not as likely to strive to have a child meet his own too-personal needs to the same degree as is the lonely or too-sentimental applicant. Likewise, in certain instances mothers who have heretofore kept the home together, who are attached to their children, and who are now rushing into war industries will neither need nor want a foster home in which their children may become too emotionally rooted. The financial motive on the part of a foster mother is, of course, no guarantee that she will not love the child placed with her any more than it is an assurance that the child placed by a mother for so-called "war" or "defense" reasons does not need love, care, and protection. However, the foster mother with a strong financial incentive may be one whose major emotional needs have already been satisfied. The child who goes to her home might then be one for whom placement does not have an irrevocable and final character, but for whom going to live for a while with "Mrs. Smith" or "Mrs. Jones" is part of what happens when war comes and mother works for defense. In other words, when rejection by his parents is neither final nor fundamental, the child, especially an older child, may

blame the war environment, not himself, for what happens to mother and to him and thereby feel less disturbed. This, however, cannot be always true, because in the best of situations children will blame themselves for being placed. Children too young to understand will always feel rejected no matter what the reason is for placement.

With the prevailing high cost of living all boarding parents must now more than ever before consider the fact of payment. Many agencies are recognizing this and consequently have raised their rates of board, both in order to conserve the homes already in use and in addition to make possible more new applications.

The idea of deliberately using less-qualified foster homes as a necessary sacrifice to the present scarcity seems a false investment for the children if by this we mean the use of foster parents whose personalities, relationships, and life are essentially unwholesome. We have always had a relative scale of values in homefinding, but within this we have seen the common sense of keeping to a selection of reasonably normal people, whether rich or poor, educated or uneducated, young or old. When we say that perhaps we are going to have to use more "limited" homes for the "duration" we mean that we shall have to use the homes we already have plus more homes just like them. After all, what foster home does not have limitations? Furthermore, the idea, frequently heard in wartime, that we can make up for limitations by "developing" the foster parent to a greater degree is doubtful. In a period of war case workers in child-placing agencies are not less busy, but actually are more pressed for time. Likewise, the idea of turning foster parents into "professional" people would seem neither desirable nor real. This is not to deny that foster

parents grow and learn from experience nor that we cannot use them in such a way as to make them more-or-less secure in what they have to give. It does concede that it is safer and sounder to base our selection of foster parents upon what they are able to bestow (their capacity for mothering, their interest in children, the benefit of their family life, their ability to share) rather than upon a vague hope of what we may turn them into. In the last analysis we want people chosen for their good, natural, inherent capacities; for qualities they have already developed. Of course it is true that all foster parents change, in the sense that they are affected by the child placed in their home, whose impact necessarily causes certain reverberations in their feelings and in their living. They are further influenced by the worker, who visits them and who frequently has ideas different from their own. It is for this reason that it is important to know beforehand that they are reasonably flexible and why the likelihood of their adaptability has significance in relation to the satisfactions of their own life and for the child's adjustment. It is important that foster parents receive during the home-finding study, an understanding of supervision as contact with a worker who comes to help them. After placement this understanding is the necessary basis for their working together. Misconceptions of supervision by so many foster parents who have taken refugee children without benefit of an agency testify to this.

It has also been said that the use of "substandard" foster homes in wartime can be balanced by the worker's skill in supervision. In other words, that it is safe to use such homes in direct proportion to the amount of skill a worker has. This puts an unreasonable and impossible

demand on workers if "substandard" includes foster parents with warped personalities, intelligence too low, or deeply entrenched hostilities. Even the best supervision cannot compensate for such limitations. To place a child in such a home and to help him "bear it" is to ask him to be an adult, not a child. After all, supervision, as a process, is intended to help him as much as the foster parent. A policy of taking substandard homes not only short-circuits the child but necessitates for the worker an even more time-consuming task. One cannot supervise a "substandard" home; one can only "police" it.

The pressures and tensions of the war, as well as the scarcity of foster homes, brings a new need to conserve and safeguard the homes we already have. Now that all the familiar and common problems of foster parents, own parents, and children are exaggerated, the worker is called upon to stretch her relationship over new as well as old difficulties. Wartime supervision, in addition to helping in the usual way in foster homes, should offer the foster mother opportunity to discuss the war-related questions of children plus her own fears and dreads. In these times the foster mother needs the reassurance of the worker's own strength. The very regularity of the worker's visits and the foster mother's trips to the office are for her evidences of something she can count on. Regular correspondence in country districts when roads are impassable can mean much. In times of crisis most foster mothers do not like to be left adrift, and naturally it is just at such periods that the worker's own increased pressures tend to spread her contacts even more thin. She may get buried under other activities at the very time when the foster mother needs her most. This situation, for the reason given, warrants a greater

consideration of group meetings for foster parents when it is necessary for workers to decrease the number of their individual contacts.

The present scarcity of foster homes, especially boarding homes, has led to the old temptation to overwork and overcrowd those now in use; that is, to place one more child in a home when this is likely to upset the good balance and wholesome psychology prevailing for the foster mother and the children already there. This is more often than not a temporary compromise which does not work. Having more children to place in boarding homes than there are foster homes to receive them challenges our capacity to develop new resources for getting foster homes and in new ways. Certain agencies are now experimenting with large-scale newspaper publicity which interprets to the public the great need of foster homes for children in wartime and points out the way in which this service is linked with defense—which, of course, it is. Foster mothers already in use are being enlisted to help bring in more foster mothers. It seems clear that old ways of soliciting applications are not enough and that the amount of time and man-power previously spent on this aspect of the job is now insufficient. It is difficult to estimate whether we have reached the so-called "saturation point" of foster-home applications until we have given more and better publicity to it than has been characteristic in the past. Objective publicity which appeals to the real interests of prospective foster parents and reaches a selective group usually has more productive results than indiscriminate advertising that stirs up the sentimentality of the reader. One of the objectives of publicity is to avoid enlisting wholesale the interest of people who should never be



encouraged to apply. When this happens, wholesale rejections are bound to take place, and "rejections are the most negative kind of publicity and can do more harm than realms of good publicity can overcome."<sup>1</sup> To believe at this time that we have reached a maximum quota of foster homes would seem unjustifiable until we are convinced that all altruism and all interest in children are dead.

The war has brought to the front the foster parent of refugee children and has resulted in quick placements on a scale larger than has been known in recent years. The tremendous and immediate response of people all over the country to the plight of refugee children attests the good will and the great interest of the public in helping them. At the same time many difficulties have arisen, difficulties that always characterize placements made in a hurry and with too little knowledge of the child and of the foster parents. A large number of foster parents made arrangements to take refugee children directly from their own parents and later found themselves disillusioned when the children and the experience proved too much for them or too different from what they had expected. To many of these people, unprepared for the experience and caught by a good impulse to be part of the war effort, the responsibilities and realities of child care, bereft of its original glamor, became unbearable. The war excitement, and the overt desire to serve acted as screens to hide from them the new turn their life would take. This group of foster parents who took children on their own initiative did not receive help with preparation for foster

<sup>1</sup> Bernard A. Roloff, "Publicity for Foster Home Finding," Department of Public Information, United War Fund, Pittsburgh, Pa.; paper presented at The National Conference of Social Work, New Orleans, 1942.

parenthood, with selection of the child, and were without support and interpretation. This is all the evidence we need to prove that child placing is more than following an impulse, more than an amateur's prerogative, and more than sentiment or a patriotic duty. Furthermore, many of these foster parents should not have undertaken these duties for reasons of their own health and well-being. Some were even advised that taking a refugee child would be a good antidote for illness, boredom, or unhappiness. The consequences of this were unfortunate for both the child and the foster parent. Out of our own experience, later confirmed by the British experience with evacuation, we have relearned that children and foster parents both have to be safeguarded if child-placing is to be generally beneficial.

Foster parents who took refugee children with the help of an agency could be protected to a greater degree. However, because of the lack of available knowledge concerning children to be placed, because of the many who had to be planned for on short notice and because of the many foster parents who crowded to get them, it was difficult to safeguard all those concerned. Certain children had to be transferred from one foster home to another; others were found to fit better into schools or into group life. Some foster parents did not want the help of an agency and only turned to it when the refugee child proved troublesome.

In the following selection of interviews a foster mother who has taken a refugee child according to a private arrangement with his parents now turns to a social agency for help because Roger is "a problem." Mrs. B., the foster mother, had casually met the boy's

parents when traveling abroad one summer before the war. At the outbreak of war Mrs. B. wrote them and offered to take Roger, age twelve, for the "duration." At the time of the following interviews Roger has been with the B's for about six months.

Mrs. B. is a nice looking, young woman with dark hair, dark eyes, and of slight build. She was wearing a sealskin coat, small black hat and wool dress. She was reserved in manner and her expression is somewhat tense, although as she talked it was evident that she had a sense of humor. It was necessary for the worker to take initiative in beginning the interview and we asked if she had been having some difficulty with Roger and would she like to tell us about it. She replied with feeling that she had had difficulty and would be very relieved to talk with someone about it. It made her shudder to think that this war might go on for four more years. We wondered what she had reference to and she said that that would mean they would have Roger with them for that length of time. We wondered what he did that made him seem difficult and she said he was such a "peculiar child." Her own children, a three year old boy and a nine year old girl, sit and look at him in utter amazement. She met Roger's mother and father on a European trip and when the war started, she and her husband "foolishly" offered to take him. We wondered what she meant when she said he was peculiar, and she said that she has since learned that he was considered a little queer even when he was in England. She wonders if his father is not the nervous type too. Roger has been told that he is intelligent and she thinks that maybe this has had some effect on him. We wondered how she thought this had been brought about, and she said he didn't seem to know how to play with children. He reads a good deal and reads quite advanced books, like the Iliad, the Odyssey, etc. When he arrived in this country his suitcase was full of books and stamp albums. He has scarcely any clothing at all.

One of the things that is so difficult is that he thinks he should entertain all of her company. He comes into the room and constantly interrupts any conversation that is going on. She had always had the idea that English children were well-mannered, but knowing Roger has made her change this opinion. He not only has no consideration for others in a social way but in addi-

tion has "terrible table manners." He eats with his hands, throws his food around on the table and on the floor, and at the end of each meal Mrs. B. has to practically clean the whole dining room. He is greedy and selfish in his eating habits and if he wants a whole plate of doughnuts for himself he sees no reason why he shouldn't have them regardless of what the rest of the family might happen to want.

We wondered if she knew anything further about his family background, about what his parents did. She knew very little but was under the impression that the father worked in an industrial plant which manufactured torches and radios. She believes that the mother is employed too and that Roger had been left alone during the day for many years. When he first came to her home, he would go into the bathroom and "do his business" regardless of who might be in there. He jumps all over the furniture with his feet, climbs around in much the manner of a small child without regard for the furniture and pretty much does as he pleases. We asked if his behavior surprised her when she thought of his parents as she had known them. She said that that was the thing that confused her so much. They did not know Mr. and Mrs. S. very well and only met them on this European trip, but even so she had no idea that their child would be like he is.

Roger expects so much from her, and is demanding of her time. For instance, in the morning before he goes to school and after he has had his breakfast, he wants her to stop everything and play a game of cards with him. Mrs. B. has not been used to doing this with her own children and she does have a lot of work to do in the morning, so she cannot play with Roger.

We said that Mrs. B. must be under quite a strain and wondered if she thought Roger realized how things were and if he seemed unhappy. Mrs. B. thought he was not conscious of the fact that he was different from her children. His attitude is one of taking things for granted and expecting to be cared for, waited on, etc. When asked if he liked going to the movies or to the parade, he will respond by an unenthusiastic "not bad." Mrs. B. doesn't want him to feel that he must be grateful for everything that is done for him, but it is baffling and puzzling to her to have him so indifferent. He hasn't said he was unhappy but he sees no reason, apparently, for saying he liked anything.

Mrs. B. said it could have worked out so nicely if he had been

a different kind of child. She has some friends in a nearby town who had such good luck with the refugee children they took. We wondered what Mrs. B. had expected in Roger and what had prompted her to have him come at all. She wasn't sure why they had wanted a child but she had just thought it would be a nice thing to do. She and her husband thought of all the bombing going on in England and just on the spur of the moment sent a cable to the S's saying they would take Roger.

When he first arrived he was extremely nervous, twisting his face and constantly scratching himself. He put his hands in his pockets and would continue to scratch. We asked if Mrs. B. thought that he was masturbating at such times. She said she wasn't sure but a friend of hers insisted he was. We asked how Mrs. B. felt about it. She showed no undue concern when discussing this matter but did not go into it further except to say that she had not observed Roger's playing with himself other than when he was scratching. This nervousness lasted for about a month after his arrival but seems to have disappeared completely now. He was very thin and undernourished looking when he came and what little clothing he had was in poor condition.

This led Mrs. B. to tell of the instructions the parents sent with Roger. There were just two things they wanted "preserved"; one was that Roger be allowed to go around in the nude as he had always been accustomed to doing at home; the other was that he not be made to go to church as both parents felt that one could lead a better life without religion. Mrs. B. said Roger tells of going about the house with no clothes on, answering the door in the nude, etc. He was soon running around the B. home in the same fashion until Mrs. B. casually suggested that he put his robe on as it was the custom in their house to go about with clothes on. We wondered what response she got when she made these suggestions. She said he was quite agreeable and for a time remembered to put on his robe, then the first thing she knew he was walking around again stark naked. Mrs. B. said that her children were not protected from such things and that they knew the difference between boys and girls and they had seen each other in the nude. However, her nine year old daughter thinks it is poor manners for Roger to be so careless.

Roger had not been made to go to church although the B. children go to Sunday School each Sunday. He has evinced a

mild interest in going to Sunday School and finally decided he would go after he heard Mrs. B's three year old boy saying his prayers one night. In the prayer he said something about God bless Roger. Roger was impressed and decided that maybe there was something in it for him after all.

We said to Mrs. B. it was clear that she had a difficult situation to handle. She spoke of sending Roger to camp. That might help out for the summer months but had she thought beyond that? Mrs. B. said she would really like to put him in a school, but didn't know whether or not they could afford it. We asked how much she could afford to pay and she was a little vague apparently not wishing to tell how much income there actually was in the family. In discussing camps she said she could not pay much more than \$5 a week so we gathered it would not be possible for her to pay much more than that for a school. We suggested \$40 a month as a possible rate for a school and she felt this was high although it "might be worth it" to have Roger taken care of.

We offered to secure more definite information about resources for both school and camps. In addition there was another service our agency offered which might be of help to Mrs. B. at this time. We had, in some instances, found it helpful to have the child himself see and talk to a worker who was specially trained in understanding and helping youngsters such as Roger. This might better enable us in helping her decide what was best for him and aid us in deciding whether he should go to school or stay here. Mrs. B. expressed interest in the suggestion and said maybe we could help figure him out. We said she had taken on a big responsibility and it sounded as if she had done quite well in handling a trying situation. Mrs. B. expressed discouragement over her lot and said she was afraid they were stuck with Roger for the duration of the war which she didn't think would be over for another four years.

Mrs. B. showed the worker a snapshot of Roger and a picture of him which was on his passport. He is a thin, angularly built boy with blond hair and fine even features. She described him as being on the "effeminate" side. His father writes to him quite regularly and writes nice letters. Roger has to be prodded to write to both his parents. His main interest seems to be reading and collecting stamps. The School reports that he is adjusting nicely. Mrs. B. minimized their evaluation by saying that he

attends a progressive school and the children are allowed to do pretty much as they please. This, she feels, fits right into what Roger doesn't need.

Mrs. B., unprepared and inexperienced beyond the narrow confines of her own family life, takes a refugee child on the impulse of the moment because of the contagious urge to do her "bit" in the war effort. A naturally conservative woman, she is shocked and dismayed when Roger turns out to be something of a "Bohemian," runs around naked, and shows various kinds of unconventional behavior. He disturbs her complacency, and her own inhibitions are assaulted. She has some resentment toward the child because in taking him she wanted to "do something nice." Along with this, she feels guilty and ashamed because of the way things have turned out. She is afraid of the boy, too, and therefore is unable to help him. The worker and the agency come into the picture too late in the sense that the situation is already well developed; however, it is not too late to make better an already unhappy state of affairs. The worker is seen to draw Mrs. B. out in order to give her relief and to gain understanding for herself. A series of further talks with the worker (not included here) greatly helped to reduce Mrs. B's bad conscience and to help her handle Roger with some confidence, while at the same time the worker learns to know the boy and investigates various schools for him. A school which would take complete charge of him seems advisable when all the facts become known to the worker.

As is true of all foster children, the impact of the refugee child affects all the members of the foster family. The following gives a further picture of what the advent

of Roger does to this family, because the parents rushed impulsively and without preparation into the taking of a child who was unselected.

Mrs. B. said in a discouraged tone that she had talked to her husband about the possibility of Roger going to another home. He had "blown up" at the suggestion and wouldn't hear of it. Mr. B. seemed to be her "biggest problem" and no matter what she suggests he "squelches" it. We commented that it made it hard when she felt she was trying; at this Mrs. B. opened up and said that it was Mr. B. who was really upset by Roger and it was because of his attitude that she was trying so hard to do something about it. He annoyed her too, but not to the extent that he did Mr. B. We wondered if he felt that way about all children or if it was just Roger. She said that their own children bothered him at times but there is nothing Roger can do that pleases Mr. B. She felt he was unreasonable in his attitude. For example, if Roger spills his food at the table, Mr. B. will look the other way as if it were too horrible a mess to see. Mrs. B. said at no time has he been so messy that it is necessary to avert one's glance. He is annoyed by Roger's constant chatter saying it is "infantile" and meaningless.

Her own children are becoming so irritable that she is afraid they will soon be just like Roger. Her little girl particularly has become so antagonistic toward him; at first she was excited and was mad because he wasn't in the same grade at school as she was. Now she picks on him and in general lets him know that she dislikes him. Mrs. B. thought Roger liked Buster better than any of the rest of the family and she believed that was because Buster was smart and Roger admired that. We wondered how Mr. B. felt about him and Mrs. B. said that he thought Roger was just dumb; no one could act the way he does and have good sense. Mrs. B. smiled faintly and said she felt Mr. B. was a little too hard on Roger in that respect as she felt he was smart enough. It just seemed, however, that there was not one characteristic which Roger possessed that they could like. She had never known a child who was so completely negative. He isn't a part of the family and although they ask him to do things with them, he just doesn't join in. They hesitate to take him to their friends' homes because he is so unpredictable. For instance, he might be apt to go through the entire house immedi-



ately upon arrival, try all the bathrooms, run the venetian blinds up and down, open and close all the doors, etc.

Later another interview is as follows:

Mrs. B. acted weary and when we asked how she was, she said she didn't know. She had a cold and thought perhaps she might be getting the flu. We asked how things were going and she said as far as Roger was concerned he was better but Lois, her nine year old daughter, is so difficult. She seems to be irritated by him and as a result constantly "picks" on him. It distressed her to have Lois act this way. She asked worker directly if we thought Lois would get over this phase of behavior that she is showing in relation to Roger. We said it seems as if she should if the whole difficulty was caused by Roger alone. Did Mrs. B. think that there was maybe more to it than just that? She said she didn't think so but Lois was a quiet child and in some ways she thought this was not so good. With some pride she said that she was "good looking" and quite "feminine." For instance, she would not consider doing anything that was the least bit tom-boyish like playing ball, etc. Mrs. B. was amused the other day when Lois came to her and asked what she thought about her attending a lecture on Indians at the school. When her mother asked why she thought she should not go, she wondered if her interest in Indians was "boyish." Mrs. B. said she knew she was dying to go all the time but is unusually sensitive on the point. She told her it was perfectly all right for her to go and that both boys and girls were interested in Indians.

We asked if that attitude of Lois' towards the things that boys could do would throw any light on why Roger was so disturbing a person to her. Mrs. B. said she had wondered about that and no one else in the family felt particularly threatened by Roger as did Lois. For instance, she is jealous of him for the things that he gets to do that she can't. She is quite irritable when she thinks that Roger is going to go to the zoo and to places in New York with a neighbor and she can't share in the experience. It wasn't so much that she wanted to go with Roger but she didn't want him to have something that she did not have. We asked if Mrs. B. had noticed what her attitude was toward Buster and if it in any way was similar to that towards Roger. She did not think there was anything unusual in their relationship. Lois had been well prepared for Buster's coming before he was born.

In fact, Lois was her father's favorite and had always felt secure in that; even after Buster was born Lois continued to be the center of attention and it took the entire family a long time to get used to having Buster. The paternal grandfather favors Lois and makes no attempt to hide his feelings.

Roger is not the only cause of these family tensions; the irritability of Mr. B. over small things, Lois' envy and jealousy, Mrs. B's anxious feelings about sex. These were all there, probably in submerged forms, before he came, but his behavior stimulates them and leaves the family at the mercy of feelings they now find difficult to control. Roger's own anxiety and unconventional behavior became the spark which set off the various latent difficulties of the B's themselves. Placing a foster child in a family can be likened to a chemical formula to which another substance is added and which then results in an additional set of reactions. This is not to suggest that child placing is dangerous; it simply means that it is only so when not safeguarded by the proved rules of experience.

The foster parent who applies for an evacuated child is likely to be one who initially sees little use for an agency. She is accustomed to governing her own household and like most foster parents in the beginning she does not visualize herself as needing any help. Furthermore, when it becomes clear to her that she does need help, it is harder for her to seek it because her self-esteem becomes involved. Many situations such as this come about because the foster parents have too little preparation for what is involved in taking a child. Sometimes safeguarding placement is too big a job for the worker because of the large number of children to be placed all at once and because of the resulting concentrated

pressures, foster parents, unacquainted with the difficulties, do not receive enough help. Years of experience have shown that caring for a foster child is different from caring for your own child. One does not have many years in which to become gradually familiar with the foster child, nor does one have the security of blood ties or the assurance of ownership (legal and psychological). The love of the own child for his parents is taken for granted by them. The love of the foster child has to be won and waited for often against his will and that of his own parents. The own child comes as a baby, unfinished and waiting to be developed. The character of the foster child (except when he is adopted in infancy) is likely to be already formed, and he comes with a "full-blown" set of habits that someone else gave him. It is for reasons such as these that foster parents need support and help. The refugee or evacuated child, notwithstanding his need, appeal, and courage, was discovered to be, after all, a child first. He brought with him not only experience, dramatic and traumatic in color, but also the personality those experiences had made, and with which foster parents had to live. It was not only his fears of sudden noise, his night terrors, and his concern with blackouts but also some of the more "humdrum" problems that foster parents were confronted with—bed-wetting, measles, different food habits, aloofness, criticism of new ways of caring for him, homesickness, lack of appreciation, and independence—to mention only a few. Calling them "guest children" meant that many foster parents felt for a long time that they could not exert as much authority over them as over their own children. This was a psychological hardship for the children and a handicap for the foster parents.

The placement of refugee or evacuated children has confirmed and reaffirmed all the old methods learned from child placing in peacetime. Furthermore, it has brought opportunities to demonstrate the value of these to the public, for whom the refugee child was often more colorful than the ordinary dependent American child. Finally, it has brought new conviction that child placing is a professional job, calling for trained and experienced workers, and that this is essential if both children and foster parents are to be protected.

Evacuation of mothers and children as a war measure may become necessary in our seaboard states, much as we dislike to face the fact. If it does come, our greatest safeguard lies in the fact that we are now experienced in the use of foster homes and know what it means to separate children from persons and things with which they are familiar. We already know what makes placement work and what defeats it. The greatest danger is that evacuation will find us unprepared and unable to put into operation the knowledge we already have. We know that hasty last-minute planning will result in panic and trauma for children and for their parents, that the conduct of separate campaigns by many individual organizations (lay and professional) will result in hardship, inefficiency, and confusion. Protection in evacuation must come through an officially appointed defense authority, able to use and coördinate the contributions of many important separate agencies and empowered to develop necessary resources (health, social work, recreation, education, vocational guidance) both in areas of potential bombing and in receiving areas.

Evacuation should begin with the development of

protective measures for children in their own homes before removal is imperative. "Any plan for evacuation presupposes . . . a coördinated program for all [the city's] children during the war. Such a program would involve proper air raid precautions, shelters, protection against gas, provisions for communal feeding, health measures and coöperation between city services (fire, police, schools, public and private social agencies and voluntary groups)."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, all protective measures are based upon "the principle of keeping mothers and young children together during and after evacuation . . . there is no substitute for mother love; it is therefore good defense as well as good family conservation to keep mothers and children together, especially in the case of babies and children under school age."<sup>3</sup> The reestablishment of mothers and children in their own quarters in protected areas belongs in any evacuation plan.

Should evacuation come, it would be necessary to secure many foster homes in safe areas. If these homes are to help uprooted children, they too must be selected and prepared. It is going to take more than a survey of available space, more than a list of willing names, to make the plan work. Selection of foster parents for their human and personal qualities, regard for their wishes and capabilities, consideration of such things as the age group with which they can best qualify, of their religious and cultural congeniality with the child's own family, all play a part and explain the necessity for experienced and trained leadership in formulating plans and in guiding voluntary groups. Furthermore, as was shown in

<sup>2</sup> American Association of Social Workers, New York Chapter, Guiding Principles and Values to Be Preserved in Evacuation Plans," 1942; mimeographed.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

England, foster parents cannot receive and care for evacuated children without considerable help. Their own willing service will need to be supplemented by resources established in receiving areas, such as those contributed by nurses, doctors, and social workers; likewise important are facilities for child-guidance, recreation and vocational needs, and centers for temporary care. The usual needs of parents and children who are transplanted will continue in the new location, and in addition there will be new needs. Should evacuation on a large scale be necessary, it would seem unreal to expect foster-family care alone to meet the emergency. Certain children already in schools and institutions might be evacuated in groups since in these groups they are already at home and feel a degree of security. Children already known to have behavior problems will need special consideration in planning whether they are to go to foster homes or to specially established treatment centers.<sup>4</sup>

Certainly before any evacuation is carried out social workers should be ready to take responsibility for planning and helping. Even more important than this will be their opportunity to show leadership in a field in which they are already familiar and experienced. Helping people in trouble has been and still is the chief justification for social work.

<sup>4</sup> Elliott, *Civil Defense Measures in the Protection of Children in War Time*.

## *In Praise of Foster Parenthood*

*MUCH* has been written in praise of motherhood. It has been idealized to a high degree of sentimentality and romanticized beyond all reality. Much less has been written in honor of foster mothers, even though foster parenthood calls for all the usual virtues and in addition qualities above and beyond those customarily associated with motherhood. There is no special virtue in loving one's own child; such love is taken for granted. However, to love someone else's child requires really uncommon qualities of heart and mind. To love and nurture a child who belongs to you is a different thing from loving and nurturing one who knows he belongs to someone else. Of all the foster parents, the boarding mother is the one deserving the greatest esteem. Her's is an exacting existence. It is she who gives generously of herself, often regardless of abnormal difficulties and in spite of the fact that they are not of her own making. It is she who takes and keeps the child whose resentment and pain at having to be separated from his own parents is almost always projected upon her. She has to wait, sometimes many weeks or months, for his trust and confidence. In many ways foster children will react to boarding parents as they have reacted to their own parents. In a psychological sense they take their own parents with them into the foster home. Many of these children have suffered indignities and deprivations at the hands

of their parents to such a degree that they come to the foster mother belligerent, unhappy, and well entrenched in their trying behavior. With such children the boarding mother lives. Consequently her satisfactions have to be postponed longer than would be considered normal for the own parent.

The boarding mother deserves special recognition because she not only takes the foster child into her home but receives his parents and relatives also. Their visits, whether frequent or infrequent, usually expose her to modes of behavior, to attitudes, and to experiences different from her own ways of living and feeling. She frequently has to endure harsh realities and violations of her accepted conventions. It is difficult for her to understand and to believe in evidences of rejection on the part of the own mother for her child. The boarding mother is likely to be a rather conservative person. Signs of irregular living in a child's own parents or differences from her own patterns of conduct are not easy for her to condone. Furthermore, she frequently has to receive parents who are unappreciative of her good efforts rendered in behalf of their child.

The boarding mother is more often than not called upon eventually to give up the child in whom she has invested much and to whom she has given abundantly of her care, time, and interest. In the course of growing up every parent must eventually let his child go. The boarding mother frequently has to give him up before her job is finished. In the meantime she shares the child with the own parents and the agency, both having more authority over his life than she has. Her ties with the child are emotional and may be severed by events beyond her own power to control.



Such realities, as pictured above, call for a constant appreciation of the woman who endures them and a recognition that her services are unique, even granting that she enjoys enough satisfactions in the experience to compensate for the hardships. The benefits of this type of gratification accrue to someone else, in this case to the child. Watching him become more confident, waiting for him to change into a more relaxed child, one able to give and to receive love, is the boarding mother's reward. In contrast to the own mother, she starts, in many instances, with children already established in their unhappy ways. Usually she does not have a free hand with untouched material, but is like the architect who remodels the old house and in so doing has to undo the old construction first.

The adoptive mother who makes another person's child her own and who takes on a lifetime of responsibility has an honorable place in the scheme of child care. Adoption has, for its purpose the simulation of the situation in which a child grows up in his own home with only one set of parents, and this situation comes closer to being normal than that of the child who is boarded and is a member of his own family and a foster family too. Often the successful adoptive mother is one who has overcome the disappointment of not gratifying her basic wish, that of having her own child. When she takes a foster child she gives up something of herself at the same time that she gains something for herself. After the initial experience of applying for and receiving a child, her satisfactions come closer to those of a mother with her own child. She has an advantage the boarding mother lacks, that of ownership and legal possession.

Motherhood of such high caliber that it is able to

accept and to help the emotionally deprived child of a stranger implies an ideal woman for whom ordinary frailties are unknown. Such a concept is unreal and unwarranted. Foster mothers are very human beings and have claim to all the foibles characteristic of people in general. Their greatest value lies in their gift for mothering and in the acceptance of themselves as truly maternal women. All normal motherhood is altruistic, but foster motherhood, when normal, is altruism at its best.

Acknowledgment of the complicated and difficult nature of child placement makes imperative not only preparation of the foster mother for the undertaking but also staying with her throughout the experience. Her selection in the first place is only the beginning of a mutual job, to which the worker brings understanding, guidance, and constant support. The skill required in working with a foster mother, the ingenuity necessary to use her in the most productive way, and the art of sharing a child with her constitute the material for another book.

Certain children will always need foster mothers. As long as parents, whether for reasons within or without themselves, fail to care for their own children, foster parenthood through its human concern and individual interest, can offer a truly beneficial way of life to a child.

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